

Amos

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Amos

"The words of Amos, who was among the herdmen of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel, two years before the earthquake."

If the prophet Amos was thus a contemporary of Hosea during some part of his ministry, there is, as we might naturally expect, considerable difference in the character and aim of the two prophets; for God does not write merely to corroborate. For Him to speak once must be sufficient. In grace He may be pleased to give confirmatory testimony, but it is never necessary. Hence, even though there may be ever such strong resemblance in accounts of the same transactions and during the same epoch, substantially at least God has always a special object before Him in the work that He assigns to each. So it will be found that Amos, inasmuch too as he was of Judah, has his own peculiarities and a distinct line from God.

The general tone of the prophecy differs from Hosea's in that the latter speaks with far more emotion, with stronger expressions of passionate grief over the condition of Israel. But there was also this difference, that Amos brings in the Gentiles incomparably more than Hosea, who is almost exclusively Jewish. Hence in the very beginning of our prophet we find the judgments that were impending over the various nations surrounding the land of Israel. We shall find further that the prophecy has a different character even in what is said of Israel and Judah; but this will properly come before us as we examine it in detail.

First then we may notice that this prophecy, though remarkably connected, consists none the less of different sections:

- The first two chapters compose a regularly constructed series of judgments, beginning with Damascus, then with Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Moab, Ammon, Judah, and Israel.
- From the beginning of Amos 3 both families are taken up, the children of Israel, the whole family, as it is said, which He brought up out of the land of Egypt.
- From this point onwards each chapter composes a section of the prophecy; so clearly that even those who object to Hosea for the broken and disjointed character of his prophecies admit the orderly series of Amos. It has been already shown how unfounded is the objection to Hosea; but it is the more remarkable in the case of Amos that the connection should be so sustained and evident, inasmuch as the portions of his prophecy were clearly separate in themselves.

The truth is, man has an indifferent judgment of the word of God; and it is a great mistake that he assumes to himself or allows others to judge it at all. It is exactly right to use it for judging others, were it even an apostle that preached. The sure and only way to profit fully by it is first of all to receive it implicitly. When we thus bow our will to God and His word we learn; it cannot be otherwise safely, however grace may save us finally. Hence moral condition is always essential to understanding the word of God. If the will be not subject, spiritual intelligence is impossible. "If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light." Surely this is worthy of God, and, more than that, it is wholesome for man. There cannot be a more dangerous thing than the appearance of high intelligence where the heart is far from God. Therefore it is the greatest mercy that spiritual intelligence is, as the rule, inseparable from a right condition of the soul with the Lord. It is very possible that the man may have bright thoughts, as indeed commonly is the case with the enemy, who contrives with positive heresy to mix up

not a little which sounds plausible and like truth. There may even be attention drawn to neglected truth; but then it is not a truth that sanctifies, but *the* truth. A truth misused may be the means of the greatest injury and danger to the soul. *The* truth is found in Christ only, and therefore it is the possession of Christ before us which alone secures both the glory of God and the blessing of man.

In our prophecy then the prophet introduces himself according to his lowly origin and condition. There is no vaunt nor puff. There was love in the Spirit, and love does not behave itself unseemly. There was boldness, as we shall find; there was a courageous uncompromising readiness to oppose wrong-doers, were it the king of Israel, but no hiding that he himself was among the herdmen of Tekoa. Further, he speaks of the king of Israel, not merely of Judah. There was no narrowness of feeling; nor was there unworthy yielding to the condition in which Israel was. There was no excuse drawn from the circumstance of the rent between the ten tribes and the two; as if one by the providence of God cast among the two was therefore to be absolved from all painful duty as to the ten. None the less the mission of Amos as a whole was to Israel. He notices Judah; but the charge given him was Jeroboam's kingdom far more than Judah. In short, his heart being with God, he loved His people as such; he loved the whole of them therefore, and could not yield to the enemy that, if sin had compelled a schism, and this had been the occasion of deeper mischief which dishonoured God, a prophet must abandon his testimony for His name, and forget that all were sons of Israel, and the objects of promise, destined yet to taste of saving mercy, as surely as they were now on the ground of law and reaping the bitter consequences of their unfaithfulness. He could wait for the day when God would cast out all stumbling-blocks and renew the bond that had been broken, renewing it too never to be severed again, under its only rightful head, the true Son of David, the Lord Christ. This we shall find in his prophecy before this notice is concluded.

Further, as Amos does not hide that he was of lowly degree, nor his connection with the south of Judah, neither does he abstain from pressing the solemnity of Jehovah's utterance by him. His words were what "he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel, two years before the earthquake:" warnings first in word, then in deed.

Observe this preface: "And he said, Jehovah will roar from Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem." Such is the opening of our prophet, who begins where Joel ends (Joel 3: 16). These references to, or citations from, other prophets are designed of God, and serve to bind the various witnesses in one testimony, as another has profitably called to our notice. But how solemn it is that Jehovah utters His voice from the central spot of His worship and government, not to comfort and direct but to denounce; and to denounce not strangers and enemies but His own people! He "will roar;" and the effect is that the shepherds mourn in the south, and the beautiful blooming Carmel withers in the north.

Then we come to particulars. "Thus saith Jehovah; For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four,* I will not turn away the punishment thereof, because they have threshed Gilead with threshing instruments of iron. But I will send a fire into the house of Hazeel which shall devour the palaces of Ben-hadad." The Spirit begins with the greatest but most external of the enemies here to be enumerated, the Syrians. Their ruthless and persevering efforts cruelly to exterminate the Jews east of the Jordan would not be forgiven. This filled the cup of Syria. "I will break also the bar of Damascus, and cut off the inhabitants from the plain of Aven, and him that holdeth the sceptre from the house of Eden: and the people of Syria shall go into captivity unto Kir, saith Jehovah." The Syrians were to go back captives to Kir (probably Kurgistan, Georgia), whence they had emerged as conquerors and settlers.

{*This formula is not to be taken as equivalent to three+four transgressions, but as the climax after several antecedent evils of lesser degree. (Compare Prov. 30: 15-31)}

So also as to Gaza, and in similar style as representing the Philistines, their old, unremitting, and active antagonists, if not an internal, at least a borderer, foe. They had been guilty of transgression upon

transgression, and therefore Jehovah would not here too turn back. He would deal summarily with their iniquity, not carrying them off merely, but annihilating them as a people. "The remnant of the Philistines shall perish, saith the Lord Jehovah."

Then comes before us Tyre, purse-proud as a city of merchant princes usually is, and by commerce connected with every part of the earth; its palaces should be devoured by fire, as in fact came to pass. "Thus saith Jehovah; For three transgressions of Tyrus, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they delivered up the whole captivity to Edom, and remembered not the brotherly covenant: but I will send a fire on the wall of Tyrus, which shall devour the palaces thereof." They were false to their brotherly covenant, and delivered up a complete captivity of the Jews to Edom, the haughty hater of the people of God. Little did they think that He saw and resented their covetous traffic in Israel.

Edom is next threatened with a judgment of no less extreme character. Here the sin was closer, as the tie was of blood, not covenant only - pitiless pursuit of his brother, and the keeping up of undying wrath. "Thus saith Jehovah; For three transgressions of Edom, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because he did pursue his brother with the sword, and did cast off all pity, and his anger did tear perpetually, and he kept his wrath for ever: but I will send a fire upon Teman, which shall devour the palaces of Bozrah."

Ammon yet political and calculating in their desire to destroy Israel for their own interests are doomed of God to go into captivity. "Thus saith Jehovah; For three transgressions of the children of Ammon, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they have ripped up the women with child of Gilead, that they might enlarge their border: but I will kindle a fire in the wall of Rabbah, and it shall devour the palaces thereof, with shouting in the day of battle, with a tempest in the day of the whirlwind." "Thus saith Jehovah; For three transgressions of Moab, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because he burned the bones of the king of Edom into lime: but I will send a fire upon Moab, and it shall devour the palaces of Kirioth: and Moab shall die with tumult, with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet." It would seem that 2 Kings 3: 26, 27, contains the fact alluded to, which most like Josephus have misinterpreted. "His eldest son" means the eldest son of the king of Edom, the heir-apparent and probably joint king, whom the king of Moab threatened to burn, and did burn his bones, when Israel refused to raise the siege.

After this we come in **Amos 2: 4** to the solemn announcement that God must deal with Judah as with their Gentile neighbours. With God sin admits of no respect of persons any more than righteousness. "For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not turn back." Here Jehovah's law was broken, and lies or idolatries were trusted.

Lastly we come (verses 6-8) to Israel's transgressions. Here there are apparently four classes of wickedness: hard selfishness (*summum jus summa injuria*, we may perhaps say); covetous grinding of the poor; licentious profanity; and idolatrous revelry. The prophet sets before them the gracious and faithful care of God both in the land and before it in Egypt, to shame them (9, 10), and His choice of their sons to be prophets and Nazarites; and what had they done? (verses 11, 12.) Patience was over; no resources should keep or deliver. "Behold I am pressed under you, as a cart is pressed that is full of sheaves. Therefore the flight shall perish from the swift, and the strong shall not strengthen his force, neither shall the mighty deliver himself: neither shall he stand that handleth the bow; and he that is swift of foot shall not deliver himself. And he that is courageous among the mighty shall flee away naked in that day, saith Jehovah." Israel had failed as a nation before God; and certainly the righteousness that punished the heathen would not spare a more privileged people who bore His name. Yet we find that in these two chapters there is only a general dealing laid down, preparatory to all the details which follow. And this is the more remarkably shown by the fact that from Amos 3 what is special is said of the two houses or the whole family of Israel.

There is more henceforth than dealing generally with Judah and Israel. It was no small dishonour that they should come into the list of guilty nations in and around Palestine scourged for repeated transgressions always ending with the worst. But if Judah and Israel had sunk to the level of the Gentiles, this does not hinder His preferring a peculiar indictment against them, both as a whole and separately. Thus, though there was in chapters 1, 2 the general inclusion of Judah and Israel with the heathen round about them, in chap. iii. we come to what is far closer, more serious and characteristic, for they are here viewed as distinguished from their neighbours.

"Hear this word." It is thus that we enter on a new division of the book. There is a similar commencement of Amos 4 and Amos 5, though each may be regarded as distinct discourses. Then comes the obviously different "woe" of Amos 6, which is followed by other modes of introduction in the rest of the prophecy. But in the third chapter, "Hear this word that Jehovah hath spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt." What is the ground here taken by God? "You only have I known of all the families of the earth." It is evident that now they are singled out, not mixed up with the Gentiles. But the conclusion is extremely solemn. Because they were thus separated to the knowledge of Jehovah, they only being known as His people, "therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities." The measure of relationship is always the measure of responsibility. The nearer one is brought, the stronger are the grounds, and the higher the character, on which one must be conformed to divine claims in obedience.

This is an invariable moral truth. It is no otherwise in human relationships. A man would resent in his wife what he could not be expected even to notice in another; he might justly and deeply claim a kind of subjection in his child, a different identification with family thoughts and interests in his son, from that which would be suitable in any other. The failure of a confidential servant, even in the eye of men of the world, is incomparably graver than that of a casual labourer. And so it is in all the details of daily as well as spiritual life. Hence under the law wickedness in a ruler was far more censurable than in one of the common people; wickedness in the anointed high priest had an import and consequences more solemn than in any other individual in Israel. We find this distinction where God measures the different offerings for sin. (Lev. 4) It is a moral necessity. There cannot be a more misleading thought than that all individuals are exactly on the same level; and that consequently all sins have just the same criminality, no matter in whom they may have been. It is contrary to what every well-regulated mind is able to discern when set before him, and certainly in direct collision with the plain word of God. The fact is that we find ourselves in various relationships; and the higher the relationship, or the greater the privileges, so much the more deplorable is unfaithfulness in that relationship and to such privileges.

This is the reason why the sin of Israel is now dealt with on quite a different ground from what was seen in Amos 2. There the question was, if the evils of the Gentiles came under the divine notice and chastening, whether Israel could be exempted from the punishment of their faults; and God shows they could not. If the Gentiles were so dealt with, Judah and Israel could not escape. But then this does not hinder there being a second count in which they are tried and found wanting. In chapter iii. they are judged not merely as faulty - others were guilty and so were they; but Israel were under Jehovah as none other was, and therefore they were chargeable with treason in a sense that none other could be. "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities." Has this no voice for us? Have we no special relationships with God? Whatever might be the nearness of an Israelite, whatever the blessings heaped on that favoured nation, how can either be compared with the place of a Christian, or of the church, the body of Christ?

Hence it is that in the instructions of Luke 12. Our Lord Jesus lays it down that in the day of His return, while the servant that did not his Master's will shall be beaten, the servant that knew his Master's will and did it not shall be beaten with more stripes. It is impossible to conceive a principle more heinously false than that favoured lands in Christendom are to be passed over more lightly in that day than the

dark wastes of heathendom. One meets too often with an impression, for instance, that this country in which the Bible has been circulated more than in any other, and whence it has been sent out beyond any other centre, will be exempted from those condign judgments of God which are predicted to fall upon Christendom. It appears plain that the revealed principles of the divine word point to a conclusion directly opposed. The truth is that the wide diffusion of the Bible creates an aggravated responsibility for those who treat it lightly, and who will assuredly under pressure yield to temptation and give up the truth. It is the evident tendency of the present day, in consequence of the difficulties of adjusting matters, to give up the public recognition of God in the country, to solve the difficulties of various sects and denominations by abandoning all distinct and positive assertion of His truth. Disgust at the selfish squabbles of religionists will lead to the setting up of secular education for instance, and to the division of the funds intended for religious purposes as spoil which will be diverted to the present interests of man. I am convinced that God will take such a notice of it as men do not expect, and that those who have despised even the defective and feeble testimony of His truth in Protestantism will pay dearly for their contempt of Himself and of His word.

No doubt a similar process of disintegration is going on in various ways throughout every other part of Christendom. Rationalistic indifferentism is at least as rife among Romanists. Hence it is that, as one part has more particularly exalted itself by its pretension to be above the others - mother and mistress of all, this very arrogance betrays its alienation from the mind of God; for the gospel is perverted into a means of the most egregious worldly ambition, and the holy name of the Crucified becomes the stepping-stone to rank and wealth, and the avowed successor of him who had not silver or gold vies with the kings and queens in the splendour of earthly show, in names of honour, and in every form of the pride and luxury of life. Greater abomination will surely yet appear; when the end of that which sincere men must acknowledge to be contrary to the word of Christ and the teaching of the apostles will be visited as no sin ever was since the world began. Such is the doom that impends over Babylon.

As to the local habitation of Babylon now, or its centre at any rate here below, no man who simply believes the Revelation can question that the seven hills are not spoken of in vain. It is plainly enough intimated where was the city which took the place not merely of being the great but the governing city, ruling the kings of the earth, and reducing them to tribute and vassalage. Rome possessed it first with a pagan profession, afterwards with at least equal ambition and cruelty but far more guilt as the metropolis of Christendom. Other systems may no doubt be bad enough, where all is arranged according to the will of man; but so-called Christian Rome has usurped the dominion of God over conscience, has compelled idolatry as a duty to Christ, has claimed through the cross dominion over the powers that be to the utter confusion of authority as well as holiness and truth, and consequently awaits a more dreadful fate than paganism or Judaism ever knew. Such is the Babylon of the Revelation.

On the other hand we must remember that it is a sorry employment merely to occupy ourselves with that which touches others. Let us seek always to bow to what God has revealed for us, and not only to what He threatens on the iniquity of others. Let us use His word for Christ's glory in our own souls, and this too with earnest desire to help others, especially such as are of the household of faith. If God has been pleased, in the greatness of His grace, to bring any of us into a better knowledge of His truth and into a larger sense of the favour He has bestowed on His church, let us remember that we are responsible exactly according to that measure.

The word "Babylon," I am aware, presents a great difficulty to many minds in applying the idea to Rome. But this arises from a misapprehension of the Apocalypse, which does not merely repeat Old Testament facts, but employs them for deeper purposes in view of the ruin of Christendom. The origin of the application of Babylon seems to be this; the essence of the name consisting in confusion, the meaning is a system of confusion; it is that which seeks and takes the place of exceeding loftiness in the earth, a grand centre, we may say, of races and peoples and tongues. But even before this the great idea

was the strength and dignity which result from combination. Later still it was the beginning of the Image power - a dominion world-wide in principle. (Dan. 2) All these combine in the apostacy of Christendom.

Doubtless the church is not a mere aggregate of churches, still less an evangelical alliance. The Christian assembly as a whole was the house of God; there were many members and but one body. Babylon may seize the idea of unity to make a carnal commandment, seeking not the faithful but all the christened world for its own purposes of pride, power, and covetousness; but it has no real conception of the truth. There cannot be the unity of the Spirit in what is merely a fleshly compact, founded on a system of earthly priests and human ordinances, with decrees, canons, and ceremonies innumerable, which may distinguish, but can never unite souls. The sole power of unity in the church of God is the baptism of the Holy Ghost. Inasmuch as Christians have one Spirit dwelling in them all, those who have the Holy Spirit thus are by this great fact members of one and the same body. They are united after the very closest sort. For while there is a base union of flesh, as the apostle so solemnly tells us in 1 Cor. 6, and there may be another legitimate and of God, what is either in comparison with the one body formed by the Holy Ghost? Flesh at best is a mere creature, and now being depraved and evil it finds its exercise in will and passion. But union in the Spirit is holy in its nature, and has for its purpose the exalting of Christ. Such is the object of the church of God here below, and anything that does not answer to this will ere long sink into a machinery for selfish purposes. It does not matter whether it be individuals or nations - anything that loses sight of God's object and is not carrying out God's plans forfeits its place really except for judgment. If we accept a name, is it not true that God deals with us according to the place we take?

This has been the case with Rome more particularly. No other can put in such a claim to be the Apocalyptic Babylon. But it is well to bear in mind that Rome will put forth her powers in ways for which most now are unprepared. It is my persuasion that those who are not founded on Christ and loving His word by the Spirit of God will merge in Babylon ere long. Thus Rome will think to have its own way immediately before its final judgment and ruin.

There are two spirits, be it never forgotten, struggling for mastery in the world now: one is that of infidelity, the other that of superstition. Of course the spirit of superstition is what triumphs in Romanism. But we must also remember that, although these powers be so opposed in appearance, there is between them a real link of connection and of kindred source under the surface. For in sober truth superstition is as really infidel in the sight of God as scepticism. The only difference is that scepticism is the infidelity of the mind, while superstition is that of the imagination. They are both veils which shut out and deny the truth of God, as they both have their spring in a real ignorance of the true God, substituting what is of the first man for the Second, one of them in a reverent tone and with appearances of devotion which outdo the truth which is according to godliness, bowing down even to lick the dust of the earth or anything else that will abase man before his earthly priest as the visible emblem of God; for this is the essence of the system. It is man abased not before God but before man. The aim of the enemy is evident. Every mind taught of the Holy Spirit in this can see without hesitation that God has not His place; and that consequently infidelity is the real root of Popery no less than of open profane scepticism.

Hence they both work so as to help each other on; because the grossness of superstition provokes and produces infidelity as a reaction, whilst the barren misery and desolation of infidelity exposes souls to the high claims of superstition to meet the cravings of the natural heart, where God is not known and self is unjudged. Thus scepticism leads persons indirectly to superstition. The cold blank of infidelity, the hopeless absence of truth, its negative character in short causes the heart to yearn for something positive, something to lean on; and if they have not God and His word to believe, by an abuse of His name they have man at any rate to confess to. Thus to regard man is superstition; but it is evident that the deliverance from it is not giving up scripture, but bowing to God instead of man.

This subjection of heart to God and His word is the sole attitude which becomes one before God; to this we are called by the word of His testimony; and when we rest on Christ's redemption, His Spirit is given

to be in us as thus brought to God. Such are those who have received the name of the Lord Jesus; for there can be no real faith in God now without accepting Christ, the Son of God and the Son of man. Impossible to please God without accepting that glorious person, who is as truly God as man, and who has wrought our reconciliation, which supposes indeed the reality of His Godhead and the perfection of His manhood, by a sacrifice in which sin has been completely and for ever judged before God. Consequently he that believes in the name of the Lord Jesus steps into all the blessing that is founded on the work of Christ and commensurate with the infinite dignity of His person.

Such is the position of a Christian. Hence all questions as to acceptance with God are absolutely settled for him, by His grace in Christ; and no matter who or what he may be, whether here or there, black or white, high or low (I do not speak of heterodoxy or sin), every Christian is to be accepted equally as a member of Christ's body. We must rejoice to accept them all as belonging to that one Head, not only for heaven by and by, but for church fellowship now. For what can be more self-condemnatory than to acknowledge a relationship for Christ which you are ashamed to own for yourself and others on the earth? Is it not of the essence of Christianity to act now on what is unseen and eternal? To allow circumstances to outweigh this does not seem to evidence real faith or genuine love. Be it our joy then as it is our duty to remember in practice that we are called now to be witnesses of what God has done for all that are Christ's, always supposing that there be no question of plain scriptural discipline. There will be no doubt of it in heaven; there should be none on earth among those who are of heaven. The trial is now, and faith and love should surely show their colours in the day of trial. It was all well to love David when as a king he sat on the throne; but the test of affection as well as of intelligence in the mind of God was when David was chased upon the mountains like a partridge.

Here it is exactly, though very far indeed from exclusively, where we are put to the proof now. Against those builded together for God's habitation in the Spirit, - which now, alas! has been disfigured and broken as far as outward manifestation is concerned, - against God's church, Satan has formed and fashioned that awful mystery of lawlessness, the greatest the world has ever seen, covering under fair forms and high-sounding names the most hideous corruption of truth and sheer rebellion against God. Such, in my judgment, is the system of the Babylon of the Revelation, where with the most shameless confusion the fairest names gloss over the foulest ways and ends, where under the profession of being the servant of servants there is at the same time really the most enthralling tyranny over conscience which can be conceived. In the same way there has been the theory of counsels of perfection, but along with it a system of indulgences for sin and a tariff of enormities for money. What wickedness cannot be bought? What evil cannot be atoned for by some corban given to what calls itself "the church"? Such a system as this must be judged to be a practical denial of God in the church, and a setting up of man in His place, under pretexts which make God a party to His own dishonour; as if the Holy Spirit had signed and sealed over the rights of Christ to men who claim to be the successors of the chief of the twelve apostles in powers which not all the twelve ever possessed, and which not one ever hints at as possible. It is needless of course to enter into more particulars. My point is not now to lecture on Romanism, but to show sufficient cause why its confusion of holy confession with the greatest practical unholiness, which characterises Rome, is called "Babylon."

It may be a question how far a Christian who has really faith in the Lord Jesus, and stands in the integrity of the results of the work of Christ, in whom therefore the Spirit of God dwells, may possibly participate in Babylon, or even manifest its spirit, its essential spiritual element.

That there have been children of God ensnared in Babylon cannot be doubted by those acquainted with early mediaeval, or even later facts. There have been children of God in the position of priests, nuns, monks, cardinals, and popes. That is to say, there have been persons who manifest by their ways and their writings that they were born of God. To me this, instead of being any reason for license, is rather a most solemn warning; because it furnishes evidence how far a converted soul may be beguiled. Nothing

can be more false than to argue that Romanism cannot be so bad a system because there have been Christians in it. Rather say the contrary: see the pit into which a Christian may fall! See the appalling quagmire into which a Christian may slip by yielding to human tradition and refusing to use the word of God to judge everything by! Thus to my mind there cannot be the smallest doubt that, as Romanism is the greatest religious imposture under the sun, so there have been children of God drawn into its toils, not merely as lowly and obscure members, but perhaps in its highest seats. I do not doubt that Popes Leo and Gregory, both styled the great, were Christians; nor do I mean to insinuate that these were the only two of whom we may think as saints and brethren in the Lord. My acquaintance with their personal history is not at all minute; but I know enough of them fully yet charitably to believe that there may have been Christians among them. This is humbling and most profitable for one's soul, because it shows to what a pitfall the allowance of unbelief may expose a Christian. It is evident that any one might be ensnared into it, especially such as occupy themselves with a truth - not the truth. From one thing indeed I should expect a person born of God to be kept, at any rate not to abide in, namely, what directly destroys the glory of the person of Christ. Now although Popery has brought in the most horrible enormities, both of doctrine and practice, yet thank God they have never given up those fundamental truths which the soul needs for salvation before God. Popery is distinct enough as to all this. I was lately reading a Latin book on theology which I had the curiosity to examine, a modern work of ability, partly because printed in America by a Roman Catholic Archbishop.* And not a little was I pleased, in the midst of feeling what a sorrowful system it is, to find greater tenacity about the foundation truth of God in that book than in many Protestant ones of our day. For instance, one of the works strongly condemned for their looseness of doctrine and heterodoxy is Barnes's *Notes on the New Testament*, a very popular book. I believe it has been published in Great Britain by various editors who are thought orthodox. But this Popish bishop is quite right, because Barnes denies the eternal Sonship of Christ; and although I should be sorry to express any opinion doubting the author's personal salvation (we have nothing to do with that which belongs to God), I have no hesitation in pronouncing the Protestant commentator unsound and Archbishop F. P. Kenrick justified in his strictures as far as that charge goes.

{*Theologiae Dogmaticae Tractatus tres, de revelatione, de ecclesia, et de verbo Dei, quos concinnavit Revmus Dnus Franciscus Patricius Kenrick, Epus Arath. in Part. Infid. et Coadj. Ep. Philadelphiensis. Philadelphiae: typis L. Johnson in Georgii vico. An. MDCCCXXXIX. Voll. iv. I believe there is a supplement of some three 8vo vols. of practical divinity. The dogmatic portion I found enough for my purpose.}

And again, who does not know that many have allowed themselves in unholy thoughts about Christ's humanity, where Popery has been quite consistently opposed? Anything like Irvingism would have been denounced by the standards of Popery, no less strenuously than Arianism and of course Unitarianism - which is only another word for infidelity. Thus whatever error directly touched the person or natures of Christ has found decided opposition from the theologians of Rome. For this one may thank God as keeping firm the basis of grace for the myriads of souls all over the world who have been entangled in that system. For surely so far as such errors go they are fatal. He who denies the supreme deity of Jesus, or His perfect humanity, is guilty of the deepest affront to God who gave His Son in infinite love, and has sent the Spirit to uphold and testify His glory. There is nothing in the Athanasian creed objectionable on this score. I believe it to be a singularly sound production, though not meaning by this that I should think it right to subscribe to it. I have long done with endorsing the dogmas of men, however excellent in themselves. At the same time, while not willing to bind myself to human definitions of faith, I am of opinion that, put forward merely as an exposition of truth on the human and divine natures in the person of Christ, it is admirable though perhaps too scholastic in form. As for the outcry about damnatory clauses, it is all a mistake. For our Lord Himself says, "He that believeth not shall be damned." Does the Athanasian creed go farther than this? No doubt some who want to do away with that creed believe it: I should be sorry to think that they do not; but if so, it seems to me that they stumble over small things.

From this digression, which may not be unseasonable or without practical use suggested by the then objects of judgment, we will pursue the course of the prophecy.

We have seen the great principle as true of an individual as of a people, and of Christendom as of Israel, that the Lord exercises righteous government with a closeness proportioned to nearness and privilege. It is in vain for unbelief to complain; for this is exactly what righteousness is and should be. The more favoured you may be, so much the more responsibility increases. This was the reason why God made so much of David's sin. How many others, even among the people of God, have been no less guilty than David, but have never been so exposed as he! For he was chastened not only himself as few ever were, but in his family also beyond most; yet spite of his grievous sins, he was one of the rarest men for faith and devotedness that ever lived in Old Testament times. It is plain that God was acting on the same principle with him individually that we find here with the nation. Impossible if one had been so favoured as he and nevertheless had made practical shipwreck - not indeed of his faith - but of a good conscience, that the Lord could righteously withhold the dreadful chastening inflicted both on him and on his family after him.

This is a peculiarly solemn consideration for us, because the Christian of all men has the greatest privileges, and hence is exposed, if unfaithful, to the severest correction. Never was there such an unfolding of grace and truth as that which came by Jesus Christ our Lord; never such a position of peace and liberty as that to which we are entitled now by the gospel - peace and sonship and nearness to God within the rent veil, not to speak of life and incorruption brought to light. As to the last the Old Testament saints too were quickened and will have incorruption, as I need scarcely say. They had a new nature as we have; they will have incorruption at Christ's coming no less truly than we. But now these blessings are "brought to light;" now there is no veil; for us darkness thoroughly passes away and uncertainty. For faith everything now is brought to an issue. Man stands convicted at the cross. Again God has made plain what He is in love and light. Consequently in such a day as this no doubt nor question becomes the soul which believes the word of God. And what is the result for man within the range of the Christian profession? That there are heavier judgments at the conclusion of Christendom than at the crisis of Israel.

There is one practical point on which I must again insist. The hope of special exemption, true of all saints, is an illusion for Great Britain, which on the contrary, as it will play its part in the dreadful tragedy of the falling away, so also cannot go unpunished.

But there is another thing of closer interest to note. The God who will judge in righteousness deals graciously. He does not soften, much less neutralize, judgment by grace, but brings in grace before the judgment in order to deliver from it those who bow to Him. We must never mingle the two together. If grace and judgment be thus jumbled, never will anything be seen aright; you may even forfeit the certainty that you are a Christian, and cannot hope to have peace in your soul. Judgment or mercy must each have its full character as well as measure - must be given a free and undisturbed course. Mercy interposes to deliver those that believe; judgment will fall on those that through unbelief are disobedient.

So here Jehovah warns His people through the prophet. He had explained to them the moral principle; now He lets them know His ways in certain brief parables or comparisons. "Can two walk together, except they be agreed? Will a lion roar in the forest, when he hath no prey? will a young lion cry out of his den, if he have taken nothing? Can a bird fall in a snare upon the earth, where no gin is for him? shall one take up a snare from the earth, and have taken nothing at all?" First, what communion could there be between God and His people in their then state? Next follow intimations of the sorrow in store for them; the lion's roar for his prey; the snare for the bird, the loud blast of warning for the careless people, all indicate it. "Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid? shall there be evil in a city, and Jehovah hath not done it?" Not moral evil: "Jehovah never does anything of the sort. It is

impossible that God should be tempted with evils in that sense, neither tempteth He any man. But evil here and in other places means execution of judgment - a tremendous thing in itself, of course, as it is God who acts.

So much has been made of this phrase that it may be well to seek that it be cleared yet more. The very expression, "Shall there be evil in a city?" indicates that it is not in view of a man's heart or life. "Evil in a city" means plague, capture, or any other severe chastening falling on it. This is all that is referred to here.

The passage speaks of Jehovah's punishment as an evil to be borne, and so it is, a fearful scourge inflicted on a city. It is Jehovah then that has done it. Others may look at the secondary instruments; but there is nothing without Him. According to the highest authority, the Lord Jesus Himself, not a sparrow falls to the ground without our Father; how much less can any judgment that envelopes a city take place without Him? Surely therefore, as He does all things, He knows all; and as He knows He communicates what He sees fitting of each judgment to those who hear His mouth and make known His mind. "The Lord Jehovah will do nothing, but he revealeth his secrets unto his servants the prophets."

The Christian stands on this wonderful ground now, inasmuch as he has a place not only priestly but prophetic. By this last I do not mean the power to utter predictions, but that he is graciously let into the secret of what God is going to do. This is the declared privilege of the disciple (John 15: 15), and the apostles extend it to Christians in general. (1 Cor. 2: 10-16; 2 Peter 3: 17) Ought we then to have a doubtful uncertain mind? I do not mean by this that we may not be exercised in the details of every day, or the claims of duty, and especially the service of the Lord. But trial of faith is one thing; the vague driftings of unbelief another. The Christian should have a sound judgment first of all as to his own soul - a thorough judgment as to self in the past as well as the present, with no cloud as to the future; a clear and simple mind both as to God's children with their hopes, and as to the course of things in the world. Some no doubt may be enabled from above to act more powerfully in this respect; but it is the Christian's privilege to know beforehand with a lowly but sure confidence in God for himself. This is what I mean by the possession of a prophetic place. It is any thing rather than a pretension to new revelations; it is really the place of one who is a believer in God's revelation, who receives His written word as that which he is bound to hold, loving to confess it as the one source of divine truth and the only standard of it. Assuredly this is very important, because in our priestly place we draw near to God, and in our prophetic place we are intended to be witnesses of the truth before the time comes when the world too must know it. The world will shortly be forced to learn in bitter sorrow how true was the word of God it despised; they will feel its force by the judgment which He will execute, by the evil which He does not only in a city then, but all over the world in various but righteous measures. The Christian ought to be familiar with it all beforehand. "Seeing ye know these things before," says the apostle, "what manner of persons ought ye to be!" It is a wholly false maxim that the Christian has to wait till the predicted things are accomplished before believing them. The very essence of his faith, as far as this is concerned, is believing them beforehand. When the world itself cannot but bow to their truth, when it will no longer be a question of men's believing them but of being broken and punished for their previous unbelief, when the judgments of God are in the earth and the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness, it will be too late for those who have trifled with the name of Christ and the privileges of Christendom. It will be too late when the long-suspended sentence falls on the guilty. The power, the peace, the comfort, is in receiving the truth before the things appear to man; there is a great blessing for the soul in it, as glory brought to God by it.

This is the moral reason for heeding prophecy in general, which the prophet Amos sets out particularly here. "The lion hath roared, who will not fear? Jehovah hath spoken, who can but prophesy? Publish on the palaces at Ashdod, and on the palaces in the land of Egypt, and say, Assemble yourselves upon the mountains of Samaria." God would expose them to their neighbours near or farther off; nay, invites

these from the heights to behold the disturbances and oppressions of Samaria. They were become reprobate of mind, whose only store consisted of violence and oppression in their palaces. Then we have a description of their evil and what must follow it. "Therefore thus saith the Lord Jehovah, An adversary there shall be even round about the land; and he shall bring down thy strength from thee, and thy palaces shall be spoiled." So that out of that strong people which enjoyed the pride of life in the corner of a bed (or divan) and a couch, the merest refuse of a remnant should be rescued. "As the shepherd taketh out of the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear;* so shall the children of Israel be taken out that dwell in Samaria in the corner of a bed, and in Damascus [in] a couch." Possibly Damascus itself is meant as the couch by a strong figure. The Lord will not permit utter destruction to His people. He will allow an extreme judgment because of their sin; but He will preserve a remnant, out of which His grace will make a strong nation. Such is the destiny yet for Israel.

{*Some have conceived that the rescued morsels have a specific meaning: the one indicating that by which one walks, the other whereby we hear the word. To me such a forge here seems more than doubtful. They appear to mean rather relies of an all but complete destruction, though possibly they may suggest more for the saved remnant by and by.}

In Amos 4 this is pursued in a still more precise manner. "Hear this word, ye kine of Bashan, that are in the mountain of Samaria." The reference is to those that dwelt at ease and are self-indulgent in Israel, the figure being taken from the herds which grazed on the rich pasture lands coveted by the two and a half tribes on the eastern bank of the Jordan. This soon leads to unfeeling indifference and oppression of others; and so the prophet proceeds to charge them: "Which oppress the poor, which crush the needy, which say to their masters, Bring, and let us drink." Intense selfishness is here laid at the door of Israel. It was the time of their most flourishing state politically, not of their real honour and glory, which was under David and Solomon. But after the rent from Judah, it might outwardly seem to man that Israel was a highly favoured people. Alas! their independence was coeval with their apostacy. They had abandoned the true God, they had set up the calves at Dan and Bethel. They were under the self-asserting government of Jeroboam, whom God had allowed to succeed as a scourge to the guilty house of David. But His eye was in no wise unobservant of their ways. Yet the very fact that He noticed oppression of the poor and other effects of their intense selfishness shows the low condition of Israel.

This I cannot but think an important principle. Suppose the church of God were occupied with rectifying the squabbles of such as did not know how to behave themselves, with frauds in business, or such like faults, moral or social, would it not indicate an exceeding low state? For, properly speaking, these are the mere evil ways of fallen men. What normally belongs to the church or the Christian, while passing no evil by, is to judge spiritual defilement according to God, offences against the holiness and the truth of God, indifference as to such evil, or connivance with it in others. Of all this natural conscience takes no cognizance, and of course they are outside the province of human law. Not that these evils of a spiritual nature are not very real and profoundly bad before God, and even more destructive to the soul than moral ones (for these are at once discerned and would trouble all save for the time the guilty actors); but doctrinal evil is subtler and taints the spirit and conduct of man insensibly. Hence it is worse than practical evil, although they are both of them inconsistent with Christ. Still it is clear that where Christians go astray the evil is naturally apt to be more of a spiritual kind, as that of the world is of a coarse and open sort.

The very fact, therefore, that God here charges upon Israel habits and practices which might be found among the heathen is a flagrant proof of the degraded state into which His people had fallen. He must judge: "The Lord Jehovah hath sworn by his holiness, that, lo, the days shall come upon you, that he will take you away with hooks, and your posterity with fishhooks. And ye shall go out at the breaches, every cow at that which is before her; and ye shall cast them into the palace, saith Jehovah." It is borrowed from helter-skelter confusion among cattle. The last phrase is rather "Ye shall cast yourselves to the

mountains of Monah," meaning perhaps Armenia. He does in His government notice, as He always must, the evil of His people that affronts and grieves Him; and He shows further that, as there were such fruits, there was a stock and root also. Their practical evil sprang from idolatrous rivalry of Himself. "Come to Beth-el and transgress; at Gilgal multiply transgression." These names, of such striking association with God, the places where God had manifested His grace and character of old, were now converted each into a focus of corruption. It was at Beth-el where their father Jacob had first seen the vision of God; at Gilgal the reproach of Egypt was rolled away for ever from the sons of Israel on their passage of the Jordan after they had left the wilderness behind. But now, alas! God was degraded as far as the wit of man could in Beth-el, as the people degraded themselves in Gilgal. The true glory of Israel had departed for a season.

The prophet then mockingly bids them come to their haunts of idolatry, but in such terms as to intimate the contrariety to God. "And bring your sacrifices every morning, and your tithes after three years: and offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven, and proclaim and publish the free offerings: for this liketh you, O ye children of Israel, saith Jehovah." It was dismal, the mingling of heathenish will-worship with the relics and reminiscences of Jehovah. It is bad enough to be careless and unfaithful in the true worship of the true God; it is the gravest insult to mingle nature worship or false gods with the true, keeping up a measure of imitation, but with marked departure from the revealed ritual.

Such was the state of ruin in which Israel now lay, and the Lord shows how He had smitten them with one affliction after another to rouse them from their self-will to feel His dishonour. "And I also have given you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and want of bread in all your places: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith Jehovah. And also I have withholder the rain from you, when there were yet three months to the harvest: and I caused it to rain upon one city, and caused it not to rain upon another city: one piece was rained upon, and the piece whereupon it rained not withered. So two or three cities wandered into one city, to drink water; but they were not satisfied: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith Jehovah. I have smitten you with blasting mildew: when your gardens and your vineyards and your fig-trees and your olive-trees increased, the palmer-worm devoured them: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith Jehovah. I have sent among you the pestilence after the manner of Egypt: your young men have I slain with the sword, and have taken away your horses; and I have made the stink of your camps to come up unto your nostrils: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith Jehovah."

Thus far they had been incorrigible; even though, as they are reminded, He had overthrown some of them as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. "And ye were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith Jehovah" (verse 11). Now He takes a new method and more ominous than any blow. They must meet Himself. "Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel. For, lo, he that formeth the mountains, and createth the wind, and declareth unto man what is his thought, that maketh the morning darkness, and "readeth upon the high places of the earth, Jehovah, The God of hosts, is his name."

It is the strange habit of some to apply this text to a soul which is under the hand of the Lord when brought to believe the gospel; but it is evidently a threat of final judgment. Fully as we may desire to own the exceeding breadth of the divine word, we should not blunt the keenness of its edge in this way. It is excellent to guard one's spirit from the least approach to a captious or critical tone in one's thoughts of the use of scripture made by any simple mind; but we should not confound grace and judgment, or the day of Jehovah with the gospel call to the sinner. There is no lack of suited appeals. There are abundant examples in point. How much more blessed to take those which are intended as a call to mercy, than to turn such a summons of God as this to meet His judgment into an invitation to hear His message in the gospel now! However this by the way.

In Amos 5 is the third call to hear with a lamentation over the ruin of the virgin of Israel. The prophet only speaks of the present government of God: in no way does he deny an after raising up of Israel, but

that their unbelief precluded any means now of staying the evil that had set in. The city that went out (that is, to war) [by] a thousand shall retain a hundred, and that which went out [by] a hundred shall retain ten for the house of Israel. Then Jehovah appeals solemnly to Israel to seek Him and live, not to seek Beth-el, nor to enter into Gilgal, nor to pass to Beer-sheba; "for Gilgal shall surely go into captivity, and Beth-el shall come to nought." When idolatrous superstition turns names and places invested with religious associations against the truth, faith must look simply and solely to God Himself. Here again it is said, "Seek Jehovah, and live; lest he break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and devour it, and there be none to quench it in Beth-el. Ye who turn judgment to wormwood, and leave off righteousness in the earth." It was but vanity or worse to cry up the sacred character of spots where God had once spoken, now alas! openly turned to the purposes of idolatry, not consecrated to God, but by the will-worship of His people. "Seek him that maketh the seven stars [the Pleiades, which consist of seven greater stars, but of many more lesser] and Orion, and turneth the shadow of death into the morning, and maketh the day dark with night; that calleth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out upon the face of the earth: Jehovah is his name: that strengtheneth the spoiled against the strong, so that the spoiled shall come against the fortress. They hate him that rebuketh in the gate, and they abhor him that speaketh uprightly. Forasmuch therefore as your treading is upon the poor, and ye take from him burdens of wheat: ye have built houses of hewn stone, but ye shall not dwell in them; ye have planted pleasant vineyards, but ye shall not drink wine of them. For I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins: they afflict the just, they take a bribe, and they turn aside the poor in the gate from their right. Therefore the prudent shall keep silence in that time; for it is an evil time."

In verses 14-17 the appeal is more moral, but in conformity with the call to seek Jehovah. "Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live: and so Jehovah, the God of hosts, shall be with you as ye have spoken. Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate: it may be that Jehovah the God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph. Therefore Jehovah, the God of hosts, the Lord, saith thus: Wailing shall be in all streets: and they shall say in all the highways, Alas! alas! and they shall call the husbandman to mourning, and such as are skilful of lamentation to wailing. And in all the vineyards shall be wailing: for I will pass through thee, saith Jehovah."

One evil was then prevalent which the prophet particularly notices, the boldness with which the people said that they desired the day of Jehovah. "Woe unto you that desire the day of Jehovah! to what end is it for you? the day of Jehovah is darkness, and not light. As if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him; and went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wale and a serpent bit him. Shall not the day of Jehovah be darkness, and not light? even very dark, and no brightness in it?" This is indeed presumptuous sin, not to believe the gospel but so to brave the day of the Lord. It is not so uncommon. We may often meet with it in Christendom. Have you not heard men say, in the midst of the present confusion, while helping it on, "It is true that the condition of Christendom is awful; but there is one comfort, that the Lord is soon coming to put it all right." Is not this desiring the day of Jehovah in a sense not remote from what is denounced here? "To what end is it for you?" If there were separation practically from what His word condemns, and devotedness to the objects He enjoins on us, it would be another matter. For the day of Jehovah can be an object of desire if our souls are free as far as our conscience knows. We may, as we ought, and must then love His appearing. Far from this being inconsistent with His will and word, it becomes us. If walking in obedience and holiness, we should surely desire it; but it is an empty and bold illusion to settle down deliberately in what is contrary to scripture, and then to talk of longing for the day of the Lord. This seems to be precisely the sin of Israel here denounced. It was an evident sham; not only a powerless word without force in the conscience, but the witness of heart-indifference to the will of Jehovah.

In general indeed there is nothing more dangerous or dreadful than to dislocate scripture from its appeal to the conscience. If I make the hopes of scripture to be simply an imaginative vision before my eyes, instead of hearing it as that which judges what I am doing, what I am saying, what I am feeling now, it is

evident that I am not in communion with God about it. I do not speak only of those who, not being real Christians, have necessarily no portion in the blessing, but even of those who appearing to be Christians do nevertheless exhibit the counterpart of Israel's bold unbelief. Assuredly their state is bad, and the thought is displeasing to God. The truth is that one object the Spirit has in setting His return before us is for leading us to clear ourselves from everything inconsistent with His will. As the apostle John says, "He that hath this hope in him purifieth himself as he is pure." It is not merely that the Lord will purify when He comes. He will; but this will be in the way of judgment. Let no man venture to await this process of purification: what we have to do is to seek it from God by His word and Spirit now. We know Christ's love; we delight in His glory; we have Him as our life; and therefore we cannot endure that any thing should be tolerated in our ways contrary to His word. Such is the only right course, if waiting for Christ.

But the sons of Israel were in a very different spirit. They were superstitious and withal, as usual in such a case, distrustful of God. They talked piety, but there was no substance, no reality, in them; and therefore the prophet can but warn what that day must be to such. "Shall not the day of Jehovah be darkness, and not light? even very dark, and no brightness in it." That day ends all fond conceits, and will admit of no lightness of heart; that day will not deal gently with sins or dishonour to the Lord. That day may well call for sackcloth and ashes, for repentance and humiliation of heart; as this day is one of rebuke and blasphemy. Happy is he who is now in the secret of the Lord and in communion with His feeling as to both. So Jehovah says, "I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols. But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream." The pretence of honouring Him in sacrifice and feast-day, in song or harp, was odious, joined as all was with self-will and departure from His word, and the setting up of idols. Then He reminds them that this departure from God was no new thing in Israel. "Have ye offered unto me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel? But ye have borne the tabernacle of your Moloch and Chiun your images,* the star of your god, which ye made to yourselves. Therefore will I cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus, saith Jehovah, whose name is the God of hosts." When the Lord judges, He always goes back to the first sin. This is much to be noticed. It is not otherwise when grace works in our souls. Suppose a Christian, for instance, to have been walking practically at a distance from God. To begin merely with what he was doing today or yesterday is not enough: we must go back to the beginning. The Lord will have him to look well and judge, and see what was the root of fruits so evidently bad. Thus even a fall is used by grace as the means of rousing the conscience by the Spirit of God. One is thus made to feel the low point to which one may have come. But the object of God in permitting it is to lead to a retracing of the steps to the first point of departure from Himself.

{*The version of Maurer and others, "The sacrifices and offerings ye presented to me during forty years in the desert; but now ye bear the shrine" is inadmissible as a question of Hebrew idiom, and destroys the whole scope of the truth intended; for it contrasts their early fidelity to Jehovah with their actual idolatry. But the t is not here the article but interrogative: else it must have been repeated which it is not. Henderson also gives several instances which prove that the insertion of the compensative Dagesh in the letter Zain has not the force alleged. So the Targum and the Syriac, the Septuagint and the Vulgate, took the sentences interrogatively as in authorised version. But some moderns even so understand the sense to be the absolute denial of offerings in the wilderness, which contradicts several express statements of scripture.}

Here we have this principle applied to the judgment of Israel.. It is not merely the calves that Jeroboam set for politico-religious purposes at Dan and Beth-el. They are reminded when and where their idolatry began, that is, in the wilderness. False gods were objects of worship there, the Moloch and the Chiun,

that they took up all the time that the Levites were carrying the ark of the tabernacle, with the sons of Israel so demurely following. They had not got rid of the gods of Egypt then. They brought these vanities along with them into the wilderness; and now this is charged upon them. "But ye have borne the shrines of your king, and the basis* of your images, the star of your god, which ye made to yourselves." Mark the circumstances. "Therefore will I cause you to go into captivity" (the deportation to the cities of the Medes) "beyond Damascus." Stephen says beyond Babylon (and so indeed was the fact) perhaps to distinguish from the Babylonish captivity. Such was the result of the old sin in the wilderness. No doubt that sin was more glaring at the end; the dark stream was always gathering further contributions to its volume. The mass of waters flowed more mightily down at its mouth than at the beginning of its course. Nevertheless God always goes back to the source, and at last declares that because of the first departure did the final blow come. The captivity of Israel was the consequence of their forefathers' sin in the wilderness, and not merely of the sins they had added to it in the land God allotted them. Of course there were many and bitter aggravations in the land; but the evils which abounded in the land were the consequence of a failure to judge the wickedness in the wilderness. It is the same thing practically with every Christian.

{*Such is probably the meaning of the difficult word Chiun, ^WYBi .

No doubt grace can and does act in the case of a Christian now, even where he might have slipped seriously aside, but where there followed deep and thorough repentance, and the sense of forgiveness which the Spirit grants. This would become the last starting point, so to speak, and grace if it went back beyond it would use it for good. Not only is He faithful and just to forgive and cleanse, but He loves to bring him who has failed when restored into a better condition than he had ever known before. Witness Simon Peter at the end of the Gospels and the beginning of the Acts. And so it will be with Israel in a future day. But self-judgment, wherever it is thorough, wherever there is a vindication of God against one's own sin, always brings one in the measure of the repentance into a corresponding measure of depth in God's grace never possessed before. There are few things more common than to see a person converted in what may be called a superficial manner. Where this is the case, there is commonly a falling into open failure of one kind or another, sometimes a shameful break-down, by which the man really becomes nothing less than a bag of broken bones, thoroughly brought to nought in his own eyes. After this, when grace has lifted him up, he will be incomparably humbler and will have a more grateful as well as chastened sense of what God is than he had when first converted. Hence, although it be a shame to him that he required such a humiliating process, it is the triumph of divine grace to use his folly for putting him that is restored into a better condition than before he went astray.

But if Peter knew and needed this, Saul of Tarsus did not require it; and I have no doubt that in the early work in the latter's soul the iron entered incomparably more deeply than into any one of the twelve. It is always indeed a matter for thankfulness, when a soul goes through a sound and grave work at the starting point; that is, when it is not all joy and comfort, but the conscience is enabled fully to be before God as to our sins, when we realise gravely all that we have been, and are thoroughly sifted out in His presence. Surely this inward work should not hinder confidence in God. This ought never to be; for grace is preached in the fullest and most absolute way when man is called and enabled to search out and confess what he is in God's sight. On the other hand, there is no need that one should have gone to great lengths of outward evil in act, in order to a profound feeling of depravity and ruin. Paul had been, we may be sure, a more scrupulously moral man all his days than any of the apostles: yet none fathomed the iniquity of his heart as he did. It is therefore very possible by grace to combine the two things, which indeed go together according to God and are dangerous if separated: a rich and unwavering sense of the grace of God in the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; and a deep (the deeper the better) moral process in the soul when it judges itself, and not its acts only, before God. It ought to be evident that this is the kind of conversion which morally most glorifies God. It is that which we see exemplified in the case of Saul of Tarsus. Hence there never was a man who had less of self-righteousness, as far as I know, - never

one who equally recognised the grace of God. Consequently wherever was a man made so great a blessing to the whole church of God? But where one at first has been drawn more by affection than by conscience, there always follows the work in conscience where the conversion is real; even so, where the inward work has been comparatively superficial, there may be the need of many a moral dealing, sometimes in pain and shame, as we see in the case of Peter. I do not think that Peter would have been allowed to deny his Lord, and to repeat and swear to it too, in a very public manner, unless there had been a good deal of self-righteousness along with ardour which carried him easily into danger but was unable to bring him safely out. Still the Lord is always good, and His grace is tender and considerate, as well as wholesome and holy. Differences there are in men; but never anything but what is good in God.

Amos 6 is a fresh appeal of Jehovah to those wrapped up in self-security, warning them of sure sorrow. "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of Samaria, which are named chief of the nations, to whom the house of Israel came?" Here they are shown that the resources of nature are impotent to hide from the judgment of God; impotent too their place of honour in being raised above the nations, with the house of Israel looking up to them. "Pass ye unto Calneh, and see; and from thence go ye to Hamath the great: then go down to Gath of the Philistines: be they better than these kingdoms? or their border greater than your border?" Calneh was far east, a very ancient city and of long continuance. (Compare Gen. 10: 10 and Isa. 10: 9) Hamath was a Canaanitish kingdom north of the land. Gath lay in the west. Where were they now? What cause Israel had to fear, worse and more guilty than they! "Ye that put far away the evil day, and cause the seat of violence to come near; that lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall; that chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of music, like David; that drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with chief ointments: but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph." Thus whether some pretend to court the day of Jehovah, or others dare not to look "the evil day" in the face that they might oppress and enjoy without remorse, it comes to the same end of judgment from God, who is not mocked in either case. Hence in verse 7 they are told that they shall be with the first that go captive, and the noisy banquet (or revel shout) of the outstretched shall depart. It will be turned into mourning and the cry of despair.

The prophet then solemnly pronounces the hatred God feels against the ways of Israel, so dishonouring to Him and so corrupting to man. "Jehovah hath sworn by himself, saith Jehovah the God of hosts, I abhor the excellency of Jacob, and hate his palaces: therefore will I deliver up the city with all that is therein. And it shall come to pass, if there remain ten men in one house, that they shall die. And a man's uncle shall take him up, and he that burneth him, to bring out the bones out of the house, and shall say unto him that is by the side of the house, Is there yet any with thee? and he shall say, No. Then shall he say, Hold thy tongue; for we may not make mention of the name of Jehovah. For, behold, Jehovah commandeth, and he will smite the great house with breaches, and the little house with clefts." It is a picture of utter desolation and despair.

Lastly, the absurdity of expecting any other result than destruction from their ways is set strikingly before them. "Shall horses run upon the rock? will one plow there with oxen? for ye have turned judgment into gall, and the fruit of righteousness into hemlock: ye which rejoice in a thing of nought, which say, Have we not taken to us horns by our own strength? But, behold, I will raise up against you a nation, O house of Israel, saith Jehovah the God of Hosts; and they shall afflict you from the entering in of Hemath unto the river of the wilderness." The Assyrian must teach Israel with thorns.

In Amos 7 a gradation of three judgments on Israel is set forth: first (verses 1-3) by the grasshoppers or creeping locusts, next (verses 4-6) by fire, and lastly (verses 7-9) by a plumbline, which intimated the strict measure applied to mark their iniquities; when patience had exhausted itself, further delay would have been connivance in evil. These troubles were accomplished historically, it would seem, in Pul, Tiglath-pileser, and Shalmaneser, who finally swept away the kingdom.

The priest Amaziah strives to arouse the fears and jealousy of the king against Amos (verses 10, 11), while he also pretends to counsel Amos for his good, his aim being to get rid of the divine testimony, which he dreaded. "Then Amaziah the priest of Beth-el sent to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, Amos hath conspired against thee in the midst of the house of Israel: the land is not able to bear all his words. For thus Amos saith, Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel shall surely be led away captive out of their own land. Also Amaziah said unto Amos, O thou seer, go, Dee thee away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesy there: but prophesy not again any more at Beth-el: for it is the king's chapel, and it is the king's court." It is remarkable how his language betrays him. Religion in Israel was political arrangements, spite of their effort to imitate the ritual of God. So here even Amaziah speaks of the king's sanctuary as naturally as of the king's court. Just so men call their religious associations by the name of their country, an invented polity or a favourite dogma. A divine source and authority is unthought of, save to adorn the structure, not for subjection of heart and obedience.

The course of this world is traversed by a godly unsparing testimony, which does not fail to be regarded as troublesome to the government. Amos sought no arm of flesh, but openly confessed who and what he was, when God summoned and commissioned him to prophesy. "I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was an herdman and a gatherer of sycamore fruit." He had not been brought up in the school of the prophets, nor had he hitherto enjoyed any other natural advantages. He could boast of no learning acquired among men. Birth or property had done nothing for him. His claim to speak was the fruit of divine grace. Any power that Amos possessed was as a true prophet of Jehovah, and solemn is the message he delivers: "Now therefore hear thou the word of Jehovah: Thou sayest, Prophecy not against Israel, and drop not thy word against the house of Isaac. Therefore thus saith Jehovah: Thy wife shall be an harlot in the city, and thy sons and thy daughters shall fall by the sword, and thy land shall be divided by line; and thou shalt die in a polluted land: and Israel shall surely go into captivity forth of his land." In the reiteration of Israel's doom the presumptuous opposition of Amaziah meets with a special, relative, and personal humiliation.

Amos 8 opens with a fourth symbol - a basket of summer fruit, betokening how near as well as sure the end was for Israel. "I will not again pass by them any more. And the songs of the temple shall be howlings in that day, saith the Lord Jehovah; there shall be many dead bodies in every place; they shall cast them forth with silence." The command of the king, the intervention of the priest, would in no way stay, but rather accelerate and increase, the punishment of their iniquity. Thus a still more solemn and complete chastening is proclaimed on Israel. Their oppressive conduct is exposed with vigour, and Jehovah's sworn judgment is repeated. Nothing yet executed meets the term of verse 9. Their worst famine should be one of the word (verses 11, 12): they shall feel the want of what they despised. The most fresh and vigorous should not escape the suffering (verses 13, 14).

Then in Amos 9 all is crowned by the vision of the Lord standing on the altar to execute without further delay the judgment Himself. "And he said, Smite the lintel of the door, that the posts may shake: and cut them in the head, all of them; and I will slay the last of them with the sword: he that fleeth of them shall not flee away, and he that escapeth of them shall not be delivered." It is no longer a question of sprinkling the lintels of the door with the blood of the paschal lamb. Now, on the contrary, it is His own people who are the object of inevitable destruction. Jehovah is not viewed here as staying His hand and passing over His people, neither does He judge others in His displeasure; He is punishing not the Egyptians or the Gentiles, but Israel. A solemn sight and sound! The theme is pursued throughout the chapter, where the Lord declares that, as His eyes were on the sinful kingdom to destroy it from the face of the earth, so on the other hand He would not destroy the house of Jacob, but He will command, and, spite of their scattered estate all over the face of the earth, He will not permit one grain to escape.

The kingdom which began in sin went on in sin and must perish. There is no prospect of restoration held out to the kingdom founded by Jeroboam. But Jehovah promises the intervention of mercy (not to Judah

merely but) to "the house of Jacob." When in the latter day restoration is taken in hand, God will assemble the outcasts of Israel no less than the dispersed of Judah. The chaff, of course, must perish in the fire. The true grain of the Lord's sowing should not fall to the ground. "All the sinners of my people shall die by the sword which say, The evil shall not overtake nor prevent us." It is not the eternal judgment of the dead raised, but a divinely inflicted judgment of the quick in this world, not while the gospel goes forth, but afterwards in view of the kingdom of the Lord over the world in power and glory. The exclusion of the power of Satan over man and the earth, and the public display of the kingdom of our Lord and His Christ, are painfully ignored by the current theology, Catholic or Protestant, Arminian or Calvinist. It is a serious gap both for Christ's glory and the right interpretation of scripture. It is a wrong both to the word of Him who never lied and to His saints who deeply need it, among those especially who are plunged in the usual uncertainty generated by this system of teaching. For if the divine word can fail as to Israel's restoration and pre-eminent glory in their land and the universal joy of the nations as such, how can we trust it for the eternal life of the believer, and for the heavenly privileges of the Christian and the church at this present time? The symmetry of the dispensations of God is also destroyed by the error to any mind capable of a comprehensive grasp of their course as a whole.

Nay, more, it is declared not only that God should preserve what was of Himself in the solemn day which is still future, but "In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David." He would not permit merely a flourishing state of Judah and of Israel as separate powers. He will reunite them and establish the rights of the united kingdom. "In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof." Weak as that rude booth or hut looked in itself, a fallen thing too, God would raise it up in the day when the strong and high and haughty must fall. Their breaches will He wall up; for many were the breaches sustained from internal weakness and external violence. Nay, He would raise up the ruins of David, and build it as in the days of old; "that they may inherit the remnant of Edom, and of all the Gentiles which are called by my name, saith Jehovah that doeth this." Here is the well-known principle which was applied by James at the council of Jerusalem to the divine right of recognising under the gospel the Gentiles without being circumcised. His argument is that they do not require to become virtual Jews in order to get the blessing of God and to bear His name. For to be circumcised is practically to be no longer a Gentile, but to become a Jew. Whereas now God is really making not Jews but Christians. Therefore to force circumcision on such Gentiles as believed was a total mistake.

On the other hand Jehovah has not yet raised up the tabernacle of David; nor is this at all intimated by James's quotation of the passage. Neither he nor any other apostle ever says that the church of God is the same thing as the booth of David. The whole system which identifies them is foreign and opposed to scripture. It is only the allegorical habit of the fathers which invented the fiction that Zion or Jerusalem, that Judah or Israel, mean the church. But this error lowers our own dignity, and deprives the ancient people of that hope for which God's providence reserves them spite of their actual unbelief. Assuredly God will bless the Jews by and by, and His name will be called upon the Gentiles. Even the most obstinate of Pharisees could not gainsay James's proof of this. If then God were pleased to call His name on Gentiles now by the gospel, who can deny the principle if he believe the prophets? Their own scriptures agree to this, and oppose the narrow-mindedness which would convert them practically into Jews in order to be called by His name. No Israelite could have conceived that God had then raised the fallen hut of David; but he could not gainsay that God spoke of all the nations on which His name should be called when that day comes. It was not inconsistent but in keeping with this, if as Gentiles they were called by His name now. James does not speak of this or any other prophetic citation being fulfilled at present. He simply quotes the broad fact from the Septuagint version, as agreeing with the principle generally laid down by the prophets that all the nations should be called by Jehovah's name. This is indeed the characteristic of the millennial day, when all Israel shall be saved, and shall inherit the remnant even of their bitterest foe as well as of all the Gentiles. Undoubtedly, when it is fulfilled, the subjection of the nations will be for ever, and the kingdom of Jehovah over all the earth, though it be of

course the kingdom of the heavens. The apostle cites this then only for present use in sanctioning the reception of Gentiles without circumcision, which it did unanswerably.*

{*Even Dr. Henderson confesses that "all attempts to apply what is said respecting the booth of David to the Christian church are unwarranted and futile." - *Minor Prophets*, p. 181, second edition.}

The rest of the prophecy speaks of the blessed restoration of the people to their land in the mercy and to the praise of Jehovah. "Behold, the days come, saith Jehovah, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt. And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith Jehovah thy God." Undoubtedly it will be a day of blessing for the souls of all that are born of God; but the prophet's description, though of what is surely beyond nature, is not therefore of heavenly things but of the earth, then indeed the sphere of boundless blessing from God without hurt or danger to man. It is in no way an emblem of the pathway of faith which makes its way by the power of the Spirit against the adverse course of the world; for Satan will then be bound and the Lord reigning not in secret but manifestly, righteousness at ease and in honour, and iniquity, if it display itself for a moment, as speedily suppressed and judged. Hence the natural emblems are here used to set out the abundance to be bestowed here below, when the Redeemer vindicates and manifests the Creator's bounty. It only misleads when the Christian reads such a passage with a view to his own circumstances. It may be lawful to apply the principle in illustration of the rich grace of our God; but we must beware of allowing such a use to deny its just and full meaning, and the evident scope and purpose of the Holy Spirit in it.

It has been well remarked how Amos, a prophet of Judah but for Israel, joins on his own prophecy to that of Joel, whose office was peculiarly toward Judah and Jerusalem, thus purposely identifying their work of testimony (Amos 1: 2). Here is a fresh instance, though Amos, evidently taking up the rich promise given at the close of Joel, goes beyond it in strength when he says that all the hills shall (not merely flow with milk, but) melt (verse 13).

But it is not wise to slight the earthly things of that kingdom which, though now exclusively spiritual and heavenly, will really embrace both the heavens and the earth in the day of the Lord's displayed glory. If the tiniest insect or the least of herbs were left outside His reconciliation, the enemy would have gained a victory over God and His Christ, which can never be. Hence the bringing again of the captivity of Israel is to be understood in its obvious import, though surely in that day the spiritual will in their case coalesce with the earthly. To interpret it, exclusively at least, of churches of Christ is infatuation, and gives sanction to a "delusive alchemy,"* which is already turned by less scrupulous hands to efface the incarnation and atonement of Christ and all other foundations. Nor have any of the allegorists any sure means of defending the truth on such principles as these. The partial return from Babylon is the pledge of a complete restoration in the day of Jehovah, as well as a condition of His coming and work whose rejection has made the promises sure in His death and resurrection. The complete fulfilment is the very reverse of ended by His coming; for He will come again, and Israel shall say, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of Jehovah, and the sure mercies of David will be enjoyed to the full. This takes nothing from the church, gives much to Israel, and glorifies Christ in all. But the error is not only unjust to God's word and His ancient people, but it is dangerously false as tending directly to blind Christendom to her impending judgment for her sins and the apostacy close at hand by holding out the false expectation of universal and perpetual triumph.

{*So R. Hooker called the habit of allegorizing without warrant or measure.}