

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

cannot lead us astray in regard to the conceptions of this Prophet; but the combination in him of two such opposite methods of conceiving God suggests to us how we should estimate anthropomorphic language in other Old Testament writers, who may not have occasion to give expression to such pure and lofty general thoughts of God side by side with it as this Prophet does.

A. B. DAVIDSON.

EZEKIEL: AN IDEAL BIOGRAPHY.

III.

THE vision of the prophet had brought before him the manifold forms of idolatrous worship at Jerusalem. He has now to learn that the evil will not go unpunished, and to look upon the ministers of vengeance as they go forth to their dread work. The vision which he describes reminds us of the seven trumpets or the seven vials of the Apocalypse (Rev. viii. 2, xvi. 1), and probably suggested the symbolism of those visions. Seven men were seen to come forth from the northern upper gate of the Temple, one of them in the white garments of the priesthood. As the leader of those who, as the angels of God, are thus sent on their work of punishment, he appears in the character of a scribe as well in that of a priest, and wears, after the manner of the East (as seen, *e.g.* in many of the Nineveh and Kouyunyk sculptures), a writer's inkhorn and reed-pen suspended at his side. With these, as the sequel shews, he is to mark those who have not bowed the knee in the false worship of the time, and are therefore to be exempted from the punishment which falls upon the guilty. The command to spare or to smite comes from "the glory of the God of Israel." That glory had moved from the cherub, *i.e.* the place between the cherubim of the mercy-seat in the

Holy of Holies to the threshold of the House, and from thence gave the command to the priestly angel and his comrades, who stood by the altar that had been desecrated by the false worship or hypocrisy of the people. That command reminds us at once of the earlier sign of the blood sprinkled on the doorposts of the houses of the Israelites, as a token that they were to be spared by the destroying angel who was sent forth against the Egyptians on the night of the first passover (Exod. xii. 22), and of the later mark, the seal of the servants of God in their foreheads, of the Apocalyptic vision (Rev. vii. 3). The mark in this case was, as the Hebrew verb indicates, to be the Hebrew letter *Tau*, the oldest form of which, as in Phœnician and earlier Hebrew alphabets, was that of a cross (see Fürst's *Lexicon*; Gesenius, *Thesaurus*; and *Monum. Phœn.*, p. 47). Such a mark had been in use from the time of the Book of Job as the equivalent of a signature¹ (Job xxxi. 35); or, as in later Arab use, was branded on sheep and cattle as a sign of ownership. To assume that there was any reference in it to the significance which was to attach to the sign of the Cross in Christian symbolism, would be perhaps too bold a hypothesis; but the fact that such a symbol appeared in the *crux ansata* (the cross with a handle to it) of Egyptian monuments, as the sign of life, may possibly have determined its selection in this instance, when it was used to indicate those who, as the people of Jehovah, bearing his stamp upon them, were to escape the doom of death passed upon the guilty. For the latter there was to be the sharp sword of judgment, beginning with those who had defiled the sanctuary with their abominations, the "ancients of the house of Israel," whom we have seen in Chap. viii. 11. The courts of the Temple were to be

¹ Where the English version has "my desire is . . ." the true rendering is "Behold my signature;" (i.e. my mark) "the Almighty will answer me." Compare Canon Cook (in *Speaker's Commentary*) and Delitzsch on Job xxxi. 35.

filled, as they actually were filled when the city was taken by the Chaldeans, with the bodies of the slain. The prophet entreated for his people, but in vain. The guilt of the transgressors had passed beyond the possibility of forgiveness, for it had taken the form of an actual denial of the sovereignty of Jehovah over his people. The formula of that denial was, "The Lord hath forsaken the earth, and the Lord seeth not." The work of judgment as seen in the prophet's vision went on unsparingly, and the scribe-priest made his report, "I have done as thou hast commanded me" (Ezek. ix. 5-11).

Fire was, however, to follow on the sword. Here also what was actually to be wrought by human agents, was seen in vision as the act of the seven angel-forms, who were thought of as the ministers of Divine vengeance. The leader of that band was to take burning coals (symbols, as in Pss. xviii. 12, cxx. 4, of the thunderbolts of God) as from the altar over which the cherubim were seen standing, on the right, *i.e.* on the south side of the sanctuary, as the region associated with the thought of fire, and scatter them over the city. It was at this moment that there flashed upon the prophet's mind, apparently for the first time, the identity of what he now looked upon with what he had seen on the banks of Chebar. The "living creatures" of that vision were one with the "cherubim" of the Temple. The glory which he had seen resting upon the living creatures was that of the Lord of Hosts who "dwelleth between the cherubim" (Ps. lxxx. 1; Isa. xxxvii. 16). And then there came, as the terrible conclusion of the whole, the vision of their departure. Wheels, cherubim, the glory cloud, the sapphire throne, rose from their place, and passed out of the eastern gate of the Temple; (Ezek. x. 17-19) the very gate, we must remember, at which the prophet had seen the worshippers of the rising sun (Ezek. viii. 16). As with the voice of which Josephus tells among the portents of the

destruction of the later Temple by the Romans, that proclaimed from the Holy Place in the silence of the night, "*Let us depart hence!*" so here there was the visible sign that the Temple was no longer the dwelling-place of the Lord of Israel, but a deserted and desecrated shrine (Jos., *Wars of the Jews*, vi. 5).

There was a strange significance in the fact, that while Ezekiel thus saw the vision of the glory of the Lord at the eastern gate, outside the Temple, the five and twenty sun-worshippers whom he had before looked on, were again seen, with two princes of the people, Jaazaniah and Pelatiah, at their head, the chief promoters of the evil which was eating like a canker into the nation's life, standing there in their attitude of boastful defiance. "It is not near," they said, when they heard from Jeremiah or others of the coming judgment. And when they learnt that he had bidden the exiles at Babylon, Ezekiel's companions, to build houses there (Jer. xxix. 5), they met that counsel with derision.¹ "No," they said; "let us build houses here." There is no danger of exile for us—Jerusalem shall yet grow and spread beyond its present boundaries. They said practically, as the men of Samaria had said before them, "The bricks are fallen down, but we will build with hewn stones" (Isa. ix. 10). "It (the city) is the caldron" (not, perhaps, without an allusive sneer at the form of Jeremiah's vision of the "seething-pot" with its face towards the North (Jer. i. 13), "and as the caldron keeps the flesh from burning in the fire, the city and its walls will protect us against the enemies without" (Ezek. xi. 7).

¹ The words are difficult, and have been variously interpreted. (1) As by Ewald, "Is it not near (for us) to build houses?"—Is not that the work that lies before us? or (2), as by Keil, "The house-building (*i.e.* that of the exiles, which Jeremiah had counselled) is not near (for us). We are here and shall remain here": or (3), as by the LXX. and Vulgate, "Have not houses been first built by us, and shall we not inhabit them?" The Authorized Version, which follows Luther, however, seems to me preferable. In any case, the words imply a self-confident security.

In replying to that boast, the prophet answers the fools according to their folly. At first he accepts their symbol, and interprets it after another fashion; not quite, perhaps, after that of the Bismarck taunt, and yet in a measure reminding us of it. "Yes, the city was a caldron, and the corpses of those who were slain by sword or pestilence were seething in it." But the hopes which they embodied in their parable he dashes to the ground. The city would not protect them from exile. They who made the boast should be taken out of that caldron, and delivered into the hands of the aliens, and should be judged, each according to his works, "in the border of Israel," *i.e.* at some place outside the frontier. Historically, Ezekiel seems to contemplate a scene like that of which we read at Riblah (Jer. xxxix. 4, 5), and which may be regarded as fulfilling his prediction.

The prophet—still, of course, in vision—pictured himself to himself as uttering these words to the five and twenty princes. He was terrified to see that they were as a sharp two-edged sword, with power to smite and to slay. One of the leaders named at the outset fell dead, as if overwhelmed with remorse and shame; and the prophet, as one awe-stricken at the terrible suddenness of the judgment, fell on his face to intercede for the others who remained. Was the sequel to be like this beginning? Would Jehovah thus "make a full end of the remnant of Israel"? (Ezek. xi. 13.)

The answer to that prayer was to indicate to the prophet that the true "remnant" (Isaiah's work had stamped that word indelibly on the minds of his successors) was not to be found in the apostate people of Jerusalem, but in the companions of his exile, among whom his lot was cast. They were his true "brethren," the "people of his kindred"; that is, as the Hebrew word (*G'ellah*) implied, those for whom he was to act as the *Goel*, or next of kin. For them, therefore, he might plead, and do the kinsman's work of

“redeeming” (Lev. xxv. 24-48; Ruth iv. 6), but not for those who spoke of them with scorn, treating their exile as a virtual excommunication, bidding them “depart far off from Jehovah,” boasting that the land of Judah was given to its inhabitants as a permanent possession (Ezek. xi. 15). The hope which was given him for these was to balance the desponding dread with which he looked forward to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, and those who still remained there. For those who were cast far off among the heathen, there was the pledge and promise that Jehovah would be to them there as a “sanctuary, for a little while,”¹ *i.e.* during the time of their exile, that He would thus fulfil the promise which Isaiah had left on record (Isa. viii. 14), and be to them, in the midst of their sufferings and their sorrows, as an asylum and a refuge. With this he combines, as Isaiah and his own master, Jeremiah, had done before him, the thought of an ultimate restoration, and rises, as if with the “new covenant” of the latter present to his mind (Jer. xxxi. 31), to the ideal of a time of a regenerated national life. “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 an heart of flesh.” So should they learn to keep the Law which their fathers had not kept; “and they shall be my people, and I will be their God.” Meanwhile judgment must do its work, and the heart which went after its “detestable things and its abominations” (Ezek. xi. 20, 21) must be left to itself.

The ecstasy which has thus filled three chapters of the prophet's book, during which he had been apparently still sitting entranced in his own house, in the land of exile,

¹ This seems a better rendering than “the little sanctuary” of the Authorized Version, though the latter has the sanction of the LXX. and Vulgate. Ewald's rendering, “I was to them but little of a sanctuary,” gives a different and less satisfactory turn to the whole passage.

with the elders of Judah before him, marvelling at his rapt look and his silence, was now near its close. The cherubim and wheels and the glory clouds moved yet further from the Temple, and took their station on the Mount of Olives, as though looking back at once with indignation and pity on the holy place; and then the trance came to an end. Ezekiel travelled back again in spirit to them of the Captivity. He awoke, and behold, it was a dream. He was again in his own home and in the presence of his neighbours. To them he reported what the Lord had thus shewn to him.

We can well imagine that they must have said of him then, as he told them of his strange vision, as they said afterwards, "Doth he not speak parables?" (Ezek. xx. 49). Was he not a dreamer of dreams? Were they not *delirantium somnia*? The teaching by the tableaux of acted parables was, however, to be carried further, and to be presented in a yet stranger form. The prophet was seen in the act of one who is preparing for a migration, and preparing in secret, carrying out his portable property, clothes, cooking utensils, and the like, not at the front door of his dwelling, but making an opening in the wattled or mud wall of his house, and going out with his goods and chattels on his shoulders in the dusk of twilight.¹ When they asked what the strange act meant, they learnt that it was to be for them a dramatic presentation of what was then passing, or shortly about to pass, in Jerusalem itself, where not only the labourers and artisans, but the king himself, should be driven to a like ignominious departure from their homes, going out, as Zedekiah did, by the back-door, as it were, of his palace, with his face covered, so that he could not see the ground, "by the way of the king's garden, by the gate between the two walls" (Jer. xxxix. 4). To make his pre-

¹ The vividness of the picture becomes more striking if we think of the wall of the house as representing that of the city, into which, or upon which, houses were often built, as in Joshua ii. 15.

diction more memorable as a proof of his insight into the future, the prophet added that the attempted flight would be ineffectual, that the fugitive king would be taken as in a net, and that though he would be brought to Babylon, he should not see it, *i.e.* as the event was to interpret the words that seemed to assert so strange a paradox, that the cruelty of the Chaldean king should deprive him of his sight, as the punishment of his resistance, and that he would linger out the rest of his life in prison and in darkness (Jer. xxxix. 7). This acted parable was followed by yet another. Ezekiel was, as before, to impose on himself, of his own will, the privations that are incident to those who, having escaped from a besieged city, are wandering as fugitives. He was to "eat his bread with quaking and to drink his water with trembling" (Ezek. xii. 18). Crouching, with frightened look, as if dreading to be observed, he was seen, after he had left his house in the strange manner already noticed, to take his meals day by day, as though he were fleeing from the face of his enemies and eager to escape detection. The prediction which this symbolism implied was met on the banks of Chebar, as like forecasts had been in the land of Israel. The scoffers sneered at the non-fulfilment of these warnings of destruction. "The days were prolonged." Things would go on as they had done. No critical catastrophe was at hand. The "visions" of such men as Jeremiah and Ezekiel would "fail" of their fulfilment. The times for their fulfilment, if they ever came, were as yet far off. The prophet's answer to that taunt is two-fold. First, he asserts that the judgment is not far off, but near: "The days are at hand, and the effect of every vision." The word which he had spoken would be fulfilled in the days of those who heard it. It was natural enough that both taunt and answer should be repeated in slightly varied form. Iteration on both sides is, at all times, the great characteristic of such controversies. We need not be surprised, therefore,

to find the prophet recording as belonging to the history of another "word of the Lord," another special revelation, the sneer of the scoffers, that "the vision which he seeth is for many days to come," and his own reply that "none of the words of the Lord should be prolonged any more;" that there was an end of tarrying and delay (Ezek. xii. 21-28).

But there were other opponents of Ezekiel's mission besides the scorers. The false prophets, men and women, misled the people with their lying words, "following their own spirit," and not the Spirit of Jehovah, having "seen nothing" with the clearness of an open vision of the future (comp. Col. ii. 18), saying, "the Lord saith," when the Lord had not sent them; and for these he has a special message of sharp rebuke. They were, he tells them, as the "foxes in the desert," prowling among the ruins of a fallen and abandoned city; and undermining those ruins as they make holes for their own shelter (Ezek. xiii. 4-5). Such teachers were far indeed from being "repairers of the breach and restorers of paths to dwell in" (Isa. lviii. 12). It was not their work to build up the broken walls and to repair the fences. That work called for sharp rebukes and the preaching of repentance, and they contented themselves with speaking smooth things, with saying, Peace, when there was no peace, after the manner of the false prophets of all times (Isa. xxx. 10, xlvi. 22). The thought of the ruins and the fences of the deserted city leads, by a natural sequence of thought, to a change of metaphor. What we call "scamp-work" in building was as common, it would seem, in the East, in Ezekiel's time, as it is with us in the nineteenth century, and he finds in that work, with its self-interested trickeries and unsoundness a parable of the action of these dishonest guides. They were as one of those who build a wall of worthless materials, while another "daubs it with untempered mortar."¹ In words, in which we

¹ There seems no sufficient reason for substituting, as Keil does, the word

trace an echo of Isaiah's description, given under like conditions, of "the breach ready to fall, swelling out in a high wall, whose breaking cometh suddenly in an instant" (Isa. xxx. 13), he declares that this structure, with its counterfeit stability, shall not stand. The "overflowing showers," and the "great hailstones," and the "stormy wind" (the words remind us of our Lord's parable of the house built on the sand, in Matthew vii. 25), of the Chaldean invaders as executing the sentence of the Divine wrath, should bring it low even to the ground, and when its fall came, men should take up their taunting proverb and ask derisively, "Where is the daubing wherewith ye daubed it?" and make answer to their own question, "The wall is no more, neither they that daubed it" (Ezek. xiii. 10-16).

And there were others who came under a like condemnation. Israel had its false prophetesses as well as its false prophets. The position occupied by Huldah during the reformation of Josiah had stimulated the imagination of the women of Jerusalem, and those who in Isaiah's time would have been conspicuous simply for their luxurious and extravagant toilet (Isa. iii. 16-26), now aspired to be leaders of the people, and claimed, like the Pythian priestesses of Delphi, and the Sibyls of Italy, to deliver oracles from God.¹ It may well be that these were conspicuous among the votaries of the Queen of Heaven, or the worshippers of Thammuz; it is possible that they were as active among

"absurdity," or "foolishness," for the reading of the Authorized Version. That meaning, which we find in Lam. ii. 14, may well have grown out of the primary significance of the word, just as the "whited sepulchre" of Matthew xxiii. 27, and the "whited wall" of Acts xxiii. 3, have become common phrases for hypocrisy. The common rendering has, at all events, the support of the LXX., Vulg., Luther, and most Hebrew lexicographers. What was probably before the prophet's mental eye was a loose rubble wall, smeared with a thin coat of mud, and that whitewashed.

¹ I reject as an utterly untenable interpretation, Keil's view that Ezekiel is still speaking of the false prophets, representing them as weak, time-serving, and effeminate, after the fashion of the Homeric: "Achaean women ye, Achaean men no more" (*Il.*, ii. 235).

the exiles in Mesopotamia as they had been in Jerusalem. Ezekiel describes them with a keen incisive vividness; but the details of that description depend mainly on two words (those rendered in our Bibles by "pillows" and "kerchiefs") which are not found elsewhere, and the meaning of which is consequently conjectural. It is obvious that the prophet paints something which was eminently characteristic of the pretensions of these soothsayers, and therefore we can hardly find in the "cushions" or "pillows," and in the "kerchiefs" or "caps," only the appliances of female luxury, like the articles named in Isaiah's catalogue (Isa. iii. 16-26). Still less tenable is the view (Keil's) that the words are figurative; that the "pillows" are the wrappings with which they sought to stay the action of the hands of God, and the "kerchiefs" those which were used to protect the heads of the guilty from his chastisements, or to blind their eyes to the tokens of his judgments.¹ I incline, rather, to Ewald's view, that both the words point to the distinctive dress worn by the prophetesses and by those whom they employed, women or children, of "every stature," in their divining processes. The "cushion" may, on this hypothesis, have been some kind of bandage, or perhaps a magic mirror, worn as a charm or phylactery under the elbow, and the "kerchief," a mantle thrown over the head and falling to the ground, giving a kind of fantastic solemnity to the wearer. Arrayed in these vestments, they entered, almost as the harlot entered on her work, on their evil task, for "handfuls of barley and for pieces of silver" as the "rewards of divination" (Num. xxii. 7; 1 Sam. ix. 7); and in that work they were guilty of a twofold wrong. They "hunted," *i.e.* persecuted the souls of God's people. They took, as birds are taken in a net² (Prov. vii. 23), the souls of those

¹ Keil, taking the rendering "all joints of *my* hands," for the "all arm-holes" of the Authorized Version.

² The words rendered "to make them fly," seems intended to describe the fluttering of birds ensnared.

who came trusting in them with a blind credulity. They, as far as in them lay, were slayers of the souls of those whom God would have to live. They promised life to those who by Him were appointed unto death. They made the hearts of the righteous sad whom He had not made sad. They strengthened the hands of the wicked that he should not turn from his wickedness and live. And therefore Jehovah was against them and the accursed symbols of their calling. He would tear their "wrappings" and their "mantles," and would release the souls that had been ensnared by them. They should know that He was indeed the Lord, and should no more see vanity nor divine divinations.

It was apparently as the result of this protest that there came the next occasion of the prophet's work. Certain of the elders of Israel came before him, as if recognizing his commission from Jehovah, to enquire of the Lord by him. It might have seemed that this was the kind of homage which would have proved acceptable. To him, however, it was far otherwise, for they came with a divided allegiance, seeking to combine the incompatible. They enquired of the Lord, while at the very time they were secretly or openly, in heart or in act, idolaters. To such as these the messenger of Jehovah would give no answer, or an answer "according to the multitude of their idols," which would be none, or worse than none. If the prophet to whom they came suffered himself to be persuaded, *i.e.* "deceived" by them, so as to speak even one word in answer to their enquiries, that word would be no true oracle from God. He would work out the righteous punishment of the hypocrisy of the enquirer and the weakness of the prophet, by sending on them a strong delusion. Once more, as in the terrible parable of 1 Kings xxii. 22, there should be a "lying spirit" in the mouth of the prophet, precipitating the doom of destruction for himself and those with whom he had

complied. To this warning the prophet yielded. He would not speak smooth things or prophesy deceits. Rather had he to speak words that went as arrows to their mark. It had been said of old that the presence of ten righteous men would avail to save a city, guilty as Sodom was, from destruction (Gen. xviii. 32). He had to declare that Judah and Jerusalem were so deeply sunk in evil that though Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, they should deliver neither sons nor daughters by their righteousness, but should deliver their own souls only from the four sore judgments of the sword and the famine, the noisome beast and the pestilence which were now to be sent upon it (Ezek. xiv. 12-22). The choice of the three representative examples of righteousness is every way remarkable: Noah belonged to the patriarchal age, and was "a just man and perfect in his generations, and walked with God" (Gen. vi. 9), and yet he had delivered those of his own household only, while those among whom he lived were swept away by the waters of the flood. Daniel¹ was the living pattern of Israelite holiness of knowledge and wisdom and unstained purity (Dan. i. 4, 17), and his prayers were, perhaps, thought of as having availed to save his three friends from the burning fiery furnace (Dan. iii. 17, 18); and it might well be that the exiles were trusting in his influence with Nebuchadnezzar as likely to be exercised to save Jerusalem from destruction. Job, representing the purer form of Semitic religion prior to, or outside the limits of, the Mosaic Covenant, had been "perfect and upright, fearing God and eschewing evil" (Job i. 1), and yet his children had perished, his wife only being still left to him; but even the aggregate righteousness of the three would be powerless to stay the impending doom of Judah. The awfulness of that sentence was, however, tempered by

¹ The mention of Daniel's name as the representative of wisdom, in Ezekiel xxviii 2, is noteworthy, as shewing the impression which he made on his contemporaries.

the thought which Ezekiel had inherited from Isaiah and other earlier prophets (Isa. i. 9; vi. 13), that the continuity of the life of Israel should not be cut off for ever, that the promises of God should not come utterly to an end. In that "remnant of sons and daughters" (some there were to be saved, but it would be by the everlasting compassion of Jehovah, not by the righteousness of Daniel or Jeremiah, or any other of their countrymen) there was the hope of the future. They, as the true Israel of God, should vindicate his ways to man, unsearchable and past finding out though those ways might be. Ezekiel almost anticipates the language of St. Paul as he thought of the apostasy of the Israel of his time, and of its ultimate restoration. "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 God" (Ezek. xiv. 22, 23). When Jeremiah had represented the many nations that gazed on the ruined and desolated city as asking, "Wherefore hath the Lord done thus unto this great city?" he had been content to give the answer, that its fall was the righteous judgment of its sins, "Because they have forsaken the covenant of their God, and worshipped other Gods and served them" (Jer. xxii. 8, 9). It was given to Ezekiel to see that the purpose of God working through that terrible chastisement was one of an everlasting mercy. Here also it would be seen that it was true of nations as of individual men, that "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." (Heb. xii. 6; Prov. iii. 11, 12.)

In the parable that follows in Chapter xv. we have to read between the lines. The prophet found, we must believe, that his people were building a false confidence on the thought of their election. Israel was the vine brought out of Egypt. It had spread its branches to the river (Ps. lxxx. 8). For the present the vineyard was laid waste, as

Isaiah had foretold it would be (Isa. v. 6). But would not Jehovah visit the vine and the branches which his right hand had planted? Should not the "boar out of the wood" and "the wild beast of the field," the Chaldean and barbarian hosts, be driven out of it and put to rout? Those who thus reasoned with themselves had to be reminded that the vine which bore no fruit, brought forth only wild grapes, was more utterly worthless than any of the trees of the forest. It did not supply material, as other trees did, for any useful work. Not even a peg on which to hang the vessels of household use could be made out of its branches (comp. Isa. xxii. 23 and Zech. x. 4 for the similitude). What remained but that the tree, already half-consumed with fire, should be left till the work of destruction was completed? The sentence passed upon the degenerate vine was that it should be utterly consumed, as the barren fig-tree in our Lord's teaching (the one parable being, it need hardly be said, the counterpart of the other): "Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?" (Luke xiii. 7). In this instance, however, there was no vine-dresser to plead, as it were, for an arrest of judgment. The probation of Israel was so far complete, and the sentence was to take its course. All that remained for the prophet's comfort was the hope, implied in what had preceded, and in the still more elaborate parable which was to follow, that even from that charred and blackened stump there might yet spring forth a shoot which should grow up, and become the vine of the future, bearing its rich purple clusters, and making glad the heart of man with the wine of its vintage. (Comp. Isa. vi. 13, x. 34, xi. 1.)

The more elaborate parable which follows, which, with its terrible counterpart in Chapter xxiii., is the longest example of that form of teaching in Hebrew literature, will call for notice in a separate paper.

E. H. PLUMPTRE.