

TWO VIEWS OF PROPHECY

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THEOLOGICAL STUDENTS FELLOWSHIP

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By

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PREFACE TO

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This booklet is an extract from Oswald T Allis' book The Unity of Isaiah first published in 1950 by the Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, from whom the whole work is still available. These two studies, however, stand on their own as a classic treatment of the whole question of the relation between prophecy and prediction of future events. It will therefore be of interest to many concerned with other questions than the unity of Isaiah since the issues it raises go right back to study of the Pentateuch.

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CHAPTER I

PROPHECY ACCORDING TO THE CRITICS

The student of history is well aware that the sceptical and decidedly hostile attitude toward the Supernatural which is so prevalent today is of relatively recent date, being largely the result of the "empirico-scientific" world-view which so powerfully influences and even controls the thinking of the "modern" man.¹ Miracle and prophecy were formerly quite generally regarded by Christians as furnishing conspicuous, even irrefutable, proof of the truth and divine authority of the Christian religion. They have now come to be regarded in many circles, even professedly Christian, as constituting the great and even the insuperable obstacle to the acceptance of Biblical Christianity by the scientifically trained man and woman of today.² Consequently, a vigorous and persistent effort has been made to eliminate the supernatural from the Bible, or at least to minimize its importance and to ignore it as much as possible. In text-books which represent the "critical" or "higher critical" viewpoint it is regarded as a matter of prime importance to *explain* the supernatural, which often means to *explain it away*, and to deal with the Bible in such a way that the supernatural will really cease to be *supernatural*. The seriousness of this attempt cannot be exaggerated. For it is not too much to say that "by its own claim the Christian religion must stand or fall with the reality of the Supernatural. . . . It presents itself to us, not as an evolution of the divine in nature, but as a direct revelation of and from God, who, though in nature, was alone before it and is also distinct from it and above it."³ In a word, to get rid of the Supernatural in Christianity is to get rid of Christianity. For Christianity is supernatural in its very essence. The simplest and most obvious illustration of this is prayer. Prayer is either communion with God, the human soul having intercourse with the God who made it, or it is merely a spiritual

¹ See the chapter on "Christianity and the Supernatural" in S. G. Craig, *Christianity Rightly So Called* (1946), pp. 89-111.

² Examples of this attitude are Millar Burrows, *An Outline of Biblical Theology* (Westminster Press, 1946), pp. 16-18, 130-132 and R. H. Pfeiffer, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Harper, 1941), p. 755. Both of these scholars regard miracle and predictive prophecy as a definite liability to Christianity.

³ W. B. Greene, Jr., Article "The Supernatural" in *Biblical and Theological Studies* by the Faculty of Princeton Theological Seminary (1912) pp. 144f.

exercise, a form of auto-suggestion, which is not converse with Another, but a kind of pious soliloquy.

The attitude of which we have been speaking is particularly plain in the attempts which have been made to eliminate *prediction* from *prophecy*.⁴ One of the most influential of the advocates of this new conception of prophecy, the late professor A. B. Davidson of Edinburgh, described the function of the Hebrew prophet in the following terms: "The prophet is always a man of his own time and it is always to the people of his own time that he speaks, not to a generation long after, nor to us. And the things of which he speaks will always be things of importance to the people of his own day, whether they be things belonging to their internal life and conduct, or things affecting their external fortunes as a people among other peoples."⁵ While this definition, as we may call it, does not deny the possibility of predictive prophecy, it tends quite obviously to minimize, if not to eliminate from it, the definitely predictive. If the prophet is "always a man of his own time," it will be natural to suppose that his viewpoint and horizon will be largely or entirely those of his own time. If he always addresses "the people of his own time" and always speaks to them of "things of importance" to them, the tendency will be to limit the scope of prophecy to the immediate concerns and the pressing interests of the people among whom the prophet lives, and to make his message deal only very sketchily, if at all, with the far horizons of the future. He will speak as a contemporary to his contemporaries. The "Thus saith the Lord," with which the prophet introduces his message and which asserts its divine source and authority, and the "Behold the days come," with which it reaches out into the dim and distant future, will tend to have little more meaning than the "In my judgment, this is what the present situation calls for" of the far-seeing statesman and the zealous preacher of righteousness. The advocates of this new conception of prophecy claim that it makes the prophets real human beings, personalities, men of flesh and blood, dealing with the vital problems of their day, instead of mere mouthpieces, colorless automatons, rapt mystics, who lived in another world from that in which their lot was actually cast. Were this all, it might simply mean that they have emphasized a side of prophecy which some over-zealous students of prophecy have been inclined to ignore or neglect. But the further and disastrous result of this "humanizing" of the prophets is that the "man of God"

⁴ See Appendix I.

⁵ *Hastings Dictionary of the Bible*, iv., p. 118b.

tends very definitely according to their teaching to become, however specially gifted, merely a "man among men."

How strongly Davidson's definition tends to minimize the predictive element in prophecy is indicated by another statement: ". . . prophecy is not identical with *prediction*. Prediction is the least element in it. I do not know that it is an essential element in it at all; though I should hesitate to affirm that it is not, because almost all, if not all, of the prophets in the remains which we possess of their literary activity do give predictions."⁶ This statement makes it quite clear that Davidson was strongly inclined to regard as unimportant and unessential a feature of prophecy which on his own admission is to be found in practically every prophetic book of the Old Testament.⁷ Even a cursory survey of the "critical" discussions of Prophecy that have appeared within recent years should make it abundantly plain to everyone that Alexander, writing a century ago, correctly defined the attitude which has characterized the critical movement from its beginning, when he said: "The successive writers of this modern school, however they may differ as to minor points among themselves, prove their identity of principle by holding that *there cannot be distinct prophetic foresight of the distant future.*"⁸

Now if, as Davidson was almost prepared to maintain, the element of prediction, at least as it concerns the distant future, forms no essential part in Biblical prophecy, the question immediately arises, How are the many predictions in the Bible which speak of such a future to be accounted for; and how are they to be dealt with to bring them into harmony with this assumption of the critics?

There are several ways in which this desired result can be accomplished. The first is to change the *situation* of the prophecy. If according to the Biblical record a certain prophecy was uttered many years before the event occurred which is elsewhere described as its fulfilment, or if it definitely refers to a far distant event, it can be alleged that, since prophecy cannot deal with a "non-existent situation," the prediction must really have been uttered much later than is stated, shortly before (or even after!) the event to which it refers. Or, if the situation as given in the Biblical record seems to be a suitable one for some such utterance as is recorded, it may be alleged that the prediction

⁶ *Old Testament Prophecy*, p. 11.

⁷ Appendix II.

⁸ J. A. Alexander, *The Earlier Prophecies of Isaiah* (1846), p. xxxviii. See Appendix III.

did not originally refer to a far distant event, that it was a general, vague, and indefinite utterance which dealt primarily with current or proximate events, and that the long range and precise fulfilment are the result of later editing, amplifying, or revising of the prophecy by writers who for various reasons wished to give special importance to these later events, by representing them as the fulfilment of ancient prediction.⁹ In this way the predictive element can be largely or wholly eliminated from the prophecy and attributed to tradition, legend, pious imagination and the like. The result is the same in either case. Either by changing the *situation*¹⁰ of the prophecy or by reducing its *scope* and the definiteness of its reference to future events, the predictive element can be largely made to disappear from Old Testament prophecy. And this is brought about on and justified by the *assumption* that predictive prophecy in the Biblical sense of the word is impossible and that the data of Scripture which so clearly teach the contrary must be brought into harmony at whatever cost with this basic principle of critical interpretation. The following examples will serve to show how this result is obtained by the critics, and also how seriously these methods to which they must resort undermine the credibility and trustworthiness of the Biblical record.

MAKING THE EVIDENCE FIT THE THEORY

Genesis 15:13, "and they shall afflict them four hundred years." Here almost at the very beginning of patriarchal history we meet with a revelation which quite obviously deals with the remote future. Its situation was sometime during the first ten years of Abram's sojourn in Canaan and before he married Hagar (16:3); and its scope covers a period of at least 400

⁹ J. M. Powis Smith ("The Study of the O. T. and of the Religion of Israel" in *A Guide to the Study of the Christian Religion*, 1916) asserts that "the history of Hebrew literature . . . is a history of revisions" (p. 152). This is and must be the assumption which underlies and supposedly justifies those "dissectings" and "emendings" of the text which are to anyone who has any regard for the authority of Scripture a major indictment of the Higher Criticism.

¹⁰ In recent years, owing to the popularity of Form Criticism (*Gattungsgeschichte*) much attention has been given to the "situation in life" (*Sitz im Leben*) of various types and patterns of Biblical literature, with a view to noting their distinctive features and tracing their history and origin. But the emphasis on *situation* as the key to the understanding of prophecy is of much earlier date. It goes back to the very beginning of the critical interpretation of Prophecy, especially as it is involved in the question of the unity of Isaiah. This is indicated by Alexander's remark that one of the main objections to the unity of Isaiah is "the assumption that the local and historical allusions of a prophet must be always those of his own time" (*The Later Prophecies of Isaiah* (1847) p. xix). See Appendix III.

years.¹¹ How do the critics bring such a prediction into accord with their theory that prophecy always deals with the present or the immediate future? They find a simple solution of the difficulty in their theory as to the origin and date of the Pentateuch. According to the view most generally held by them, none of the documents of which they believe the Pentateuch to be composed dates from earlier than the 9th century B.C. (a thousand years or more later than Abraham's time). They hold that the particular documents (J and E) of which this chapter was composed were not combined until about 650 B.C., that the latest of the sources (P) dates from a couple of centuries later, and that the final editing of the Pentateuch was not completed until about 450 B.C. Hence, for those who hold that these documents are all many centuries later than the time of Abraham and that they were *edited, revised, and redacted* in process of time, it is both natural and easy to argue or simply assert that the "prediction" to Abram was "colored" by the actual course of subsequent events. Thus, a prominent critic has even suggested that, since the late writer (P) records as a fact of history that the sojourn in Egypt was "430 years" (Ex. 12:40), the final editor may have inserted in Gen. 15:13 the words "400 years."¹² Thus the development might have been as follows; the oldest document (J) says nothing about a sojourn in a strange land, the next one (E) speaks of such a sojourn and of a return in the fourth generation (v. 16), the final editor or redactor inserts the words, "and they shall serve them 400 years," and he does it on the basis of the record of the fulfilment given in the latest document (P).¹³ This is of course equivalent to saying that the remarkable scope and definiteness of the prediction in Gen. 15:13 is simply due to the reading back into it of the record of its fulfilment. The actual *situation* of the prediction in the form in which it stands in Gen. 15:13 is thus placed later than the event which *fulfils* it! It becomes a prophecy *post eventum*. Obviously those who are prepared to accept such an explanation of the prophecy have no reason to be troubled or disconcerted

¹¹ We need not concern ourselves here with the difficult and much debated question whether the 400 years, which are more exactly defined in Ex. 12:41 as 430 years refer only to the length of the sojourn in Egypt (the Long Chronology) or include the prior sojourn of the patriarchs in the land of Canaan (the Short Chronology). On either interpretation, the prophecy, since it deals with a period which extends at least four centuries into the unknown future, is definitely predictive.

¹² Peake's *Commentary on the Bible*, p. 150. The notes on Genesis are by the editor.

¹³ See Skinner's discussion of Gunkel's analysis of chap. 15 in his *Commentary on Genesis in the Internat. Crit. Series*, p. 277.

by the fact that it refers to a distant future. The prediction in its original form, if indeed there was such a prediction at all, may have been vague and indefinite and have referred to a proximate event such as Abraham's brief sojourn in Gerar. Dextrous manipulation of the evidence can produce surprising results! Gen. 46:1-4 must of course be similarly treated.

Genesis 49 contains a prediction regarding "the last days" uttered by the patriarch Jacob. It concerns the future of his sons and their descendants; and it was uttered by Jacob from his deathbed (v. 33). That was the *situation* of the prophecy according to the Biblical narrative. The critical interpretation gives us quite a different situation. It is this: "The allusions in the poem are to conditions in the period of the Judges, Samuel, and David. The date of the composition, therefore, is probably in the 10th century B.C."¹⁴ Since the death of David took place rather early in the 10th century, a "composition" dating from the middle of that century which dealt with "conditions" in the time of David and earlier would not really deal with the future at all. There would not need to be any prediction in it. For its situation would be determined by the actual course of the *historical* events which it records. The fact that these events are described as *future* and represented as *predicted* by Jacob would then mean either that the author simply put them into the mouth of the patriarch with a view to giving them added authority, or that he edited or touched up an old prophecy, allegedly by Jacob, adding details which the critics now recognize as evidencing its late date.

Deuteronomy 28 has, according to the context in which it stands, a very striking and impressive situation. It forms part of one of the memorable discourses delivered by Moses shortly before his death to the generation of Israelites which was about to enter in and possess the land which their fathers had failed to gain because of disobedience and unbelief. It is full, therefore, of exhortation and warning for the future. Toward the end of the chapter, the awful consequences of disobedience are portrayed with the utmost vividness (vss. 47-57). This utterance has been dated by most critics from about the time of Josiah's reform (622 B.C.). This reduces the prophetic perspective very greatly, especially if the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar is regarded as particularly referred to. For a contemporary of Josiah might well imagine that Jerusalem would suffer the same fate at the hands of the Chaldean kings of Babylon as Samaria had suffered a century before at the hands of the war-

¹⁴ *Westminster Study Edition of the Holy Bible* (1948), p. 85.

like Assyrian. But some critics go much further than this. According to one interpretation we have in these verses an *eye-witness* description of the actual siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar.¹⁶ According to another it is the siege of Samaria by Shalmaneser and Sargon which is here portrayed.¹⁶ This gives us three situations for the prophecy all of which are quite different from the Biblical one. The advocates of these three views differ among themselves as to the actual situation of the prophecy. But they are agreed in rejecting the situation assigned to it by the Bible (that it was uttered by Moses); and they are agreed in choosing situations which either reduce the predictive element very greatly or eliminate it completely.

1 *Samuel 2:1-10*. Hannah concludes her prayer of thanksgiving and praise with the words: "And he shall give strength unto his king and exalt the horn of his anointed." This was prophetic. For it was Hannah's son Samuel, a mere child when she uttered these words, who was destined to be the "king maker," to anoint first Saul and then David to be king over Israel. We do not know how old Samuel was when he anointed Saul. Probably an interval of forty to fifty years lay between the prophecy and its first fulfilment. So we are told that, "It is generally agreed by critics that this psalm bears no relation to the circumstances of Samuel's birth, and that it cannot have been composed by Hannah. The reference to the king in v. 10 presupposes a later age than that of Hannah, and the whole tenor of the poem points to a more advanced stage of Hebrew thought, the leading idea being the sovereign power of Jehovah." The ascription to Hannah is explained as due to "a mistaken application of 1:5*b* to the circumstances of Hannah."¹⁷ In other words, according to the theory held by the critics as to the situation and scope of prophecy, Hannah could not have uttered the words which are ascribed to her. So the statement in 1:5*b* is to be regarded as a *mistake*.

2 *Samuel 7*. This chapter contains the great Messianic prophecy regarding David's house, which has its fulfilment in Solomon and in the Messiah, "great David's greater Son." The occasion is definitely stated. It was David's desire to build a house for the

¹⁶ R. H. Pfeiffer, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 184.

¹⁶ A. C. Welch, *The Code of Deuteronomy*, pp. 571., 193ff.; also *Deuteronomy, the Framework of the Code*, p. 204.

¹⁷ *A New Commentary*, edited by Gore, Goudge, and Guillaume (1928), p. 218. Similarly we are told in the *Westminster Study Edition* regarding v. 10 "This suggests that a Messianic psalm of different origin has been used by the editor to express Hannah's exultation" (p. 373). If this was done by the "final" editor, the psalm might have been inserted as late as "between 650 and 530 B.C." (p. 369).

Lord, after the Lord had given him rest from his enemies. Nathan's prophecy speaks first of David's "seed," who shall build the house which David is not permitted to build, and then it goes on to speak of David's "house" and "kingdom" which are to continue "for ever." That this prophecy was uttered before the birth of Solomon is indicated by v. 12 (cf. 1 Chr. 22:9) and that it is intended as a prediction is obvious. But the view of the critics, as stated by one of them, is that it was "probably composed toward the close of the Jewish Monarchy by a writer of the Deuteronomic school. (Verse) 13, referring to Solomon and his Temple, is a later addition. This Divine promise of permanence to the Davidic dynasty is an early form of the Messianic Hope of Israel."¹⁸ It will be noted that this writer is not content with claiming that the narrative was "composed" by a writer of the Deuteronomic school,¹⁹ which makes it several centuries later than the time of David. He goes still further and treats v. 13 as "a later addition." This disposes of the prediction regarding Solomon and the building of the temple. And the Messianic prediction in which, as David says, the Lord has spoken of His servant's house "for a great while to come" is spoken of as "an early form of the Messianic Hope of Israel." The use of the word "early" in speaking of a composition which according to the critics probably dates from "toward the close of the Jewish Monarchy" is significant because, as we have just seen, according to 1 Sam. 2, Hannah a generation before David's time prophesied concerning "the Anointed" (*Messiah*) of the Lord.

1 Kings 13. This prophecy regarding the altar at Bethel is given a very definite situation, the reign of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, probably soon after he instituted the calf-worship at Bethel (v. 1). An unnamed prophet declares "in the name of the Lord" that "a child shall be born unto the house of David,

¹⁸ So W. H. Bennett, in *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*, p. 288. Similarly Driver in his *Introduction* included this chapter, as well as Hannah's Song, among the passages which he regarded as "relatively the latest" in the Books of Samuel (p. 183). Cf. Creelmann, *Introd.* p. 77. According to Cornill, "the question is, whether this chapter is the root of Messianic prophecy or one of the latter's offshoots. Everything argues the latter alternative; it can hardly have been written before the time of Isaiah" (*Introd.*, p. 197).

¹⁹ Cf. the discussion of Deut. 28 above. It is the view of the critics that a school of writers living about the time of Josiah composed the Book of Deuteronomy and represented it as Mosaic and also that they edited the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings to make their statements accord with the teachings of Deuteronomy. This was, of course, a necessary further step because they had represented their "law book" as so ancient and claimed for it the authority of Moses. Consequently to the critics "Deuteronomic" is equivalent to non-Mosaic!

Josiah by name," who shall profane and destroy the altar at Bethel at which Jeroboam is now sacrificing. Jeroboam was the first king of the Northern Kingdom. Josiah was the last great king of the Southern Kingdom and came to the throne nearly a century after the last of Jeroboam's successors on the throne of Israel had passed away. Hence the mention of Josiah by name makes the element of prediction in this prophecy very striking. As to this we are told by the critics: "A prophet from Judah denounces Jeroboam's sanctuary at Beth-el and foretells its destruction. Since Josiah carried out this destruction, his name became attached to this prediction (2 Kgs. 23:17)."²⁰ Here the Biblical "situation" is accepted as correct. But the reference to Josiah by name is eliminated; and the predictive element is reduced to language which, it may seem to the critic, might have been uttered by any prophet or pious Israelite, who had a zeal for the true worship of the God of Israel and abhorred idolatry as an abomination which He would surely punish severely.²¹

2 Kings 10:28-31 contains the promise made to Jehu that his sons "of the fourth generation" should sit upon his throne. If, as seems probable, the situation of this prophetic utterance was early in Jehu's reign, it would have a scope of some eighty years. In any case it covered more than half a century, since the reign of Jeroboam II was about forty years in length. Consequently, we find that this passage is described as one of "the more important editorial (redactional) verses of different date" in 2 Kings.²² If it is the work of the "Deuteronomic" redactor, who plays an important role in these books, according to the critics, it would represent a revision or insertion dating from

²⁰ *Westminster Study Edition*, pp. 468f. A more drastic method is simply to treat chap. 13 as "a prophetic legend of a highly grotesque sort" (Cornill, *Introduction*, p. 213) and declare it to be "a quite late production." Cf. Creelman, *Introduction*, p. 134. A special reason for this drastic treatment of 1 Kgs. 13 is, of course, that this prophecy has frequently been appealed to as furnishing a parallel, both in scope and definiteness to the Cyrus prophecy (Isa. 44:28) considered as an utterance of Isaiah, the son of Amoz.

²¹ The mention of Josiah by name in this prophecy is not the only *definite* feature in it, although it is the one which has received the most attention and been most frequently challenged. The description of the method by which the defiling of the altar was to be accomplished is equally noteworthy. The "offering" (i.e., "sacrificing") of the priests of the high places on their own altars and the burning of dead men's bones on them to defile them are both unique features which are expressly referred to in II Kgs. 23:16, 20 as fulfilled by Josiah. In fact the phraseology of the latter passage in describing the fulfilment follows that of chap. 13 to a noticeable degree. Those who regard the naming of Josiah as suspicious and treat it as a later addition must go still further and eliminate these other equally precise features from the prophecy.

²² Creelman, *Introduction*, p. 138.

about a century after the fall of the Northern Kingdom and about two centuries after the prophecy purported to have been made. This would make it easy to assert that an ancient tradition that Jehu's revolt was viewed with favor by the religious leaders of his time, was later worked up into a specific, long-range prediction, long after the event to which it referred had become a fact of history.

Psalms 45:6, "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever." We are told by the critics that this psalm "was composed in celebration of the marriage of one of Israel's kings," and that "these words are addressed to the king, who rules as God's representative." It is further pointed out that, "In most countries of the ancient East the kings were deified, but Israelite kings were not"—a statement of fact which is very important. "This address, however, follows the Eastern pattern." This is stated categorically despite the damaging admission which is immediately added: "There is no other example of this address in the O.T." So we are told: "Later this psalm was explained by Jewish interpreters as referring to the Messiah. Many Christians have also allegorized it in order to make it refer to Christ and the Church."²³ "Many Christians" must include, therefore, the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews. For "Heb. 1:8, 9 applies this passage to Christ." So we are left to decide for ourselves whether such Jewish-Christian allegorizing has any warrant in fact! The *original* meaning, according to these critics, was that the writer in the extravagance and exuberance of poetic panegyric was extolling the Israelitish king and praising him as *divine*! And this style of courtly address, which is such a flagrant violation of the First Commandment and so inappropriate to any earthly king, is later *applied* in the Epistle to the Hebrews to the Divine Messiah! Nay more, it is appealed to as proof of His uniqueness!

Psalms 110:1. According to the heading, this psalm is Davidic, which means that it was composed within the lifetime of David the son of Jesse (cir. 1000 B.C.). This gives us its *situation* in general terms. In all three of the Synoptic Gospels we are told that Jesus quoted this verse, in an argument with the scribes and Pharisees, to prove that the Messiah, who is David's son, being also David's Lord, must be greater than his father David.

²³ *Westminster Study Edition*, pp. 738f. The comment on Heb. 1:7f. in the N. T. section of this handbook (p. 406) simply tells us that in vv. 5-14 "The Son's superiority is attested by a series of O. T. passages." Regarding vv. 8f. which quotes Ps. 45:6f. we are told that it attests "his righteous character." We are not told that it asserts his *Deity*. We could not expect this in view of the treatment of the psalm in the O. T. section.

The argument has three steps: that *David* uttered these words (all three Gospels assert this specifically), that in uttering them he spake by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and that he was speaking of his "Son," the Messianic King who was to come of his house, and called him *Lord*. The whole point of the argument lies in the situation (authorship) of the words quoted: that it is David the king who speaks of his royal Descendant as greater than himself: "If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?" The critics have long maintained that only relatively few of the Psalms are Davidic, and that even those which may have been composed by him were more or less extensively edited in the course of time.²⁴ So they speak of this psalm as "popularly supposed to be by David and to refer to the Messiah," as "commonly thought to be written by David," and point out that "(the Jews) hold that David wrote Ps. 110:1 and regard it as Messianic"—all of which serves to indicate more or less definitely the view which they clearly hold, which is that "David may not have written Ps. 110."²⁵ Yet they argue that this does not affect "the point" of the argument which they hold to be "that the Messiah is Lord and no mere follower of another's pattern of leadership and rule."²⁶ This amounts to saying that the basis of the argument, the Davidic *authorship* of the psalm, the Davidic *situation* of the prophecy, can be questioned or denied, without affecting the validity of the conclusion, that David's Son must be greater than His father David.

Isaiah 7:8b, "and within threescore and five years shall Ephraim be broken, that it be not a people." With these words the prophet pronounces the final doom of the apostate Northern Kingdom. It has long been recognized that there were three steps in the fulfilment of this prediction: (1) the invasion of Tiglath-pileser who came to the aid of Ahaz against Rezin and Pekah and who greatly weakened the power of the Northern Kingdom by warfare and deportation (2 Kgs. 15:27-31; 16:7-9); (2) the capture of Samaria by Sargon in 722 B.C. (2 Kgs. 17:6); (3) the

²⁴ A thorough discussion of "The Headings of the Psalms" was published by Prof. R. D. Wilson in the *Princeton Theological Review* (1926), vol. xxiv, pp. 1-37, 353-395. His conclusion was: "As far as the objective evidence goes the headings of the psalms are presumptively correct" (p. 395).

²⁵ "May not" is so definitely an understatement that it sounds almost ironical, were it not obviously intended to avoid shocking the reader too much by a definite denial of Davidic authorship. Most critics are quite certain that David did not write this psalm.

²⁶ *Westminster Study Edition* (N. T. Section), pp. 60f., 100f., 154. The sentence which precedes the one just quoted is noteworthy: "V. 37 does not necessarily deny the Davidic descent of the Messiah, but insists that by his divine position and power the Messiah is the Lord of David as of all men" (p. 101).

repopulating of Samaria with foreigners by Esarhaddon (17:24; Ezra 4:2). The invasion of Judea by Rezin and Pekah which was the occasion of this prophecy took place about 734 B.C. The interval between this event and Esarhaddon's death in 669 B.C. is approximately 65 years. When Esarhaddon issued his edict we do not know. But it was within the 65 years of the prediction. So understood the prediction was fulfilled as Isaiah foretold; and the "breaking" of Samaria included and ended with the repopling of the land by strangers. Yet many critics are prepared to insist that the fulfilment must be found in the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C. Some treat v. 8*b* as a gloss added by a later editor who was better acquainted with *history* than Isaiah and his contemporaries could have been and who knew of Esarhaddon's colonizing of Samaria.²⁷ Another explanation which is offered is that Isaiah simply overestimated the time required for the overthrow of the Northern Kingdom. So we are told: "*threescore and five*. Actually Ephraim, the Northern Kingdom, fell in 722/721 B.C., only twelve years after this prophecy."²⁸ The object of the "actually . . . only" is of course to make it very plain to the reader that the prophet Isaiah made a guess which missed the mark by more than half a century. To make such an inference appear inevitable, no mention is made of the possibility that the prophecy may properly include a reference to any event later than the fall of Samaria.

Isaiah 7:14. According to the critical theory regarding prophecy, the logical, we may even say the inevitable, interpretation of the Immanuel Prophecy has recently been stated very briefly as follows: "v. 14. *virgin*. The Hebrew word means a young woman old enough for marriage. The prediction is that nine months hence a mother will name her newborn son Immanuel ('God with Us') as an expression of faith that God is with his people to save them."²⁹ This is the entire comment on this verse. There is no intimation that the "prediction" is Messianic. It is to be fulfilled in nine months. When we turn to the comment on Matt. 1:23*f*. in the same volume we read: "v. 23. Cf. Isa. 7:14. *virgin*. The Hebrew word means 'young woman'; the Greek translation is followed here. The Isaiah verse, originally spoken of a birth in Isaiah's day, is here applied to Jesus' birth."³⁰ It is to be carefully noted that the commentators say "applied" not "fulfilled." There is a world of difference between

²⁷ Cf., Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaja*, 1902, p. 49.

²⁸ *Westminster Study Edition*, p. 936. Delitzsch traces this view back to Eichhorn.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 936. See Appendix IV.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 26 (N. T. Section).

the two words. Furthermore they do not tell us why it was so applied or whether such an application was legitimate or not. Their main desire seems to be to deny that Isaiah referred to a *virgin* birth; and they are not even prepared to insist that Matthew did.³¹ Here we have, both in what is said and in what is left unsaid, the logical conclusions of the critical interpretation of prophecy: Isaiah referred to a perfectly natural and normal birth which was already in process of accomplishment when he spoke these words. Hence the only connection between it and the birth of Jesus, if there is any connection, must be found in the *analogy* between the two events. In a time of national peril and apostasy, Isaiah saw in the not at all improbable event that a young mother, with the faith and joyous anticipation which has characterized motherhood from the time of Eve, would give her newborn son the name "God with us," the proof that God had not forsaken and would not forsake his people. Similarly, seven centuries later, in a time of national peril another young mother, with similar hope and expectancy, calls her infant son, not Immanuel but a still more significant and precious name, Jesus ("The LORD is salvation"), as the expression of a similar faith. There is an analogy. Yes! but nothing we can call a *fulfilment*. And if the birth of Immanuel in Isaiah's time was a perfectly natural one, then analogy would clearly favor the rejection of the virgin birth of Jesus.³²

³¹That such is the case is indicated by the following words contained in the notes to Matt. 1:18-25 in the *Westminster Study Edition*. "Jesus Christ was not merely a man who earned divine recognition. His birth was the result of the creative act of the living God, who by his Spirit thus acted to give salvation to his people (v. 21). On any view of the birth of Jesus, this conviction of God's purposeful working is basic" (p. 25). The words, "on any view of the birth of Jesus," are significant. In their context they indicate quite plainly that the editors admit, and, in view of their insistence upon the meaning "young woman" instead of "virgin," that they prefer some other view of the birth of Jesus than that one which involves a virgin birth. This raises a vital question. Both Matthew and Luke tell us definitely that Joseph was the father of Jesus only by adoption. If Jesus was not "conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary," whose son was He?

³²Thus Zenos, on the assumption that "the only admissible view" of the prophecy is that it refers to a birth in the prophet's own time, gives us the choice between two explanations of the use of the prophecy by Matthew: viz., that "the use of the passage by Matthew must be either the result of misunderstanding of the prophet's meaning, or the appropriation of his words as a formula in which the virgin birth of the Saviour might be felicitously embodied." He tells us that the evangelist may have expressed his thought of the meaning of the birth of Jesus by "applying the old oracle to the event he was narrating." And he adds, "Such an appropriation although not correct, judged by standards of modern literary and historical usage, would be in perfect harmony with the methods of using the O. T. at the time" (*New Standard Bible Dictionary*, p. 368b). Such an explanation speaks volumes. It not only denies the unique inspiration of the New Testament writers. It asserts that their standards of literary honesty were lower than our own.

Isaiah 9:6. The name of the child that is to be "given" to Israel appears in AV and RV as "Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of peace." According to this rendering, every one of these marvellous titles is to be borne by the Child that is here described. It is a glorious Messianic prophecy. Yet we are now being told that "The name given him may be translated, 'A wonderful counsellor is the mighty God, the Father of eternity, the Prince of peace.'" In order that the full implication of this rendering may be appreciated by the reader, the explanation is added, "The Messiah's name describes the nature of the God for whom he is to rule."³³ This means that every one of these glorious titles and attributes is by this translation taken away from the Messiah and given to "the God for whom he is to rule." So understood, this name does not differ essentially from many other theophoric names in the O.T., which describe the character of the God of Israel and not the character of the person who bears the name. Such names as Elimelech (My God is king), Gedaliah (Jehovah is great), Jehoram (Jehovah is exalted) tell us nothing about the men who bore them, but only describe the character of the God whom they (supposedly) worshipped. In some cases these men were true to their names, like Elijah whose name, My God is Jehovah, was the very symbol and epitome of the mighty struggle at Carmel (1 Kgs. 18:39). In other cases their very names condemned them, or were falsified in meaning by their lives. Such was the case with both Jehoram of Israel and Jehoram of Judah; while Manasseh, who *forgot* the God of Israel and served Baal, gave to a name rich in historical significance (Gen. 41:51) a sinister meaning which made it synonymous with Apostate. Consequently, this new interpretation of the name of the Messiah empties it of all Messianic significance. It need not refer to Christ; and to call the prophecy Messianic, while at the same time emptying it of its richest and most precious meaning, is unworthy of the sober and careful scholar and indicates a definite anti-supernatural bias.³⁴

Isaiah 13 contains an utterance which is specifically described as "the burden of Babylon, which Isaiah the son of Amoz did see." This heading assigns the utterance a situation in the Assyrian period and probably during the reign of Hezekiah. It refers to the overthrow of this great city by the Medes, a

³³ *Westminster Study Edition*, p. 939.

³⁴ For a defense of the traditional interpretation of this passage, see article, "The Child whose Name is Wonderful," by John D. Davis, in *Biblical & Theol. Studies*, by the Faculty of Princeton Theological Seminary, 1912, pp. 91-108.

disaster which certainly began with the capture of the city by the Medes and Persians in 538 B.C., but was not completed until a considerably later date. So we are told by the critics that "This *burden* or pronouncement of doom, upon Babylon, dates from the time when Media (v. 17) was threatening it, in the middle of the sixth century B.C."³⁵ This means that the heading of the prophecy (v. 1) is to be completely disregarded, and the utterance is to be assigned to a situation more than a century after Isaiah's time when the Median menace was clearly in view.³⁶

Isaiah 39:5-7. The prediction that "sons," i.e., descendants of Hezekiah will be carried to Babylon can be dated fairly accurately. The occasion was the coming of the servants of Merodach-baladan to congratulate Hezekiah on his restoration to health and to inquire about the sign which had been given him (2 Chr. 32:31). This indicates a date or situation in about the middle of Hezekiah's reign for a prediction which was not fulfilled for more than a century. If the narrative comes to us from the pen of Isaiah himself, we have here a definite prediction of future events. But many critics prefer to take the view that chaps. 36-39 of Isaiah have been taken over from 2 Kings. This makes it possible to argue that the hand of the Deuteronomic redactor has been at work on this prediction.³⁷

Micah 4:10. Here the Babylonian Captivity is clearly predicted by a prophet whose situation, according to 1:1, was not

³⁵ *Westminster Study Edition*, p. 945. Cf. p. 955 where a similar statement is made regarding chap. 21: "Prediction (not by Isaiah) that Babylon will be conquered by the Elamites and the Medes (cf. ch. 13). Babylon was taken by the Persians in 539 B.C."

³⁶ G. A. Smith denied the Isaianic authorship of chaps. 13-14:23, 24-27, 34-35, nearly eight chapters in the First Part of Isaiah, because he regarded them as "containing no reference to Isaiah himself nor to any Jewish king under whom he labored, and painting both Israel and the foreign world in quite a different state from that in which they lay during his lifetime." He says of chap. 13, "Only one of the prophecies in question confirms the tradition that it is by Isaiah, viz., chap. xiii., which bears the title, *Oracle of Babylon which Isaiah, the son of Amos, did see.*" To meet this difficulty he remarks: "but titles are themselves so much the report of tradition, being of a later date than the rest of the text, that it is best to argue the question apart from them" (*Book of Isaiah*, ii. p. 403). In other words, if a passage has no heading or title, the critic is at liberty to determine its date solely on the basis of his view as to its probable situation. If it has a title, that title is to be ignored if it conflicts with the critic's decision as to the situation. It is this arbitrary treatment of the evidence which is one of the greatest defects in the professedly *scientific* and *objective* method of the critics. It proves that it is neither objective nor scientific, but on the contrary decidedly subjective and arbitrary.

³⁷ Eiselen (*Prophectical Books of the O. T.*, Vol. 1, p. 183) includes among six reasons favoring this view the presence of "'Deuteronomic' conceptions and phrases." This would indicate that this account was subjected to editorial revision as late as the time of Josiah's reign (cfr. 622 B.C.).

later than the reign of Hezekiah (the Assyrian period). The critics are not agreed as to whether all or most of chaps. 4-5 should be treated as exilic or post-exilic, or whether the words "and thou shalt come to Babylon" and some other passages should be eliminated as later glosses in what may then be regarded as a substantially early document.³⁸ Many of them are of the opinion that the "situation" of these chapters is different from that of what they regard as the genuine portions of the book. So the alternative, as they see it, is either a late gloss in an early prophetic utterance or the entire utterance is late; two quite effective ways of dealing with the predictive element in this prophecy.

Micah 5:2. This prophecy of the Ruler to be born in Bethlehem is of special interest because in the incident recorded in Matt. 2:1-12 it is mentioned as the one to which "all the chief priests and the scribes of the people" referred Herod when he put to them the question of the Magi, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?" The answer was precise: "in Bethlehem of Judaea"; and it is undeniable that it is this passage in the Book of Micah which they referred to, a prophecy ancient in Herod's time, even if the critics refuse to admit it to be by Micah the Morashtite. This appeal to Micah makes it quite clear that the Jews of our Lord's day believed that the birth of the Messiah in Bethlehem was foretold centuries before His coming (cf. Jn. 7:42). Such being the case it is not surprising to find this passage in Matt. described as "parabolic"³⁹ or as a "Christian Midrash rather than authentic history"⁴⁰ and that the O. T. passage is all but ignored. For such a treatment of it relieves the commentator of the necessity of admitting that the prophecy of Micah 5:2 is a prediction of the event recorded in Matt. 2:1-12.

Jeremiah 25:11-14. According to the context (v. 1) this prophecy of the captivity in Babylon was uttered in the 4th year of Jehoiakim. The captivity which is soon to commence is to last "seventy years." We are told regarding this chapter, "Almost all scholars agree that the present text of Jer. 25 is an expansion

³⁸ John Paterson tells us that as to chaps. 4-5, "there is a variety of opinion, and many scholars would deny these to Micah" (*The Goodly Fellowship*, p. 86). Nowack (*Die Kleine Propheten*), who accepts the general prediction in 3:12 as genuine, regards the mention of Babylon in 4:10 and most of the verses of chap. 4 as later than Micah.

³⁹ *Westminster Study Edition* (N. T. section, p. 26): "This story may be a parabolic way of saying that Num. 24:17 has been fulfilled."

⁴⁰ "Indeed, it is possible that the story of the Magi is, at any rate in part, a Christian Midrash rather than authentic history, though the compiler of the Gospel may not have recognized its true character" (*A New Com.* by Gore, Goudge and Guillaume, *in loco*).

from its original form by a later writer," also that "The critical verses are 11-14 and 26b."⁴¹ Since it is v. 11 which makes mention of the "seventy years," it is quite obvious why this verse should be regarded as "critical" and assigned to "a later writer"; who probably wrote after the captivity was ended!

Jer. 31:31-4. The "New Covenant." This prophecy is quoted in Heb. 8:8-12. It is clearly referred to in the words of Jesus, "this cup is the new testament (covenant) in my blood." This clearly represents the words of Jeremiah as predicting and having their fulfilment in the atoning work of Christ and in the Church which He founded upon it. But we note in the critical interpretation a tendency to represent this prophecy as referring to and capable of fulfilment in Jeremiah's own day. Thus we are told: "Here, then, is the New Covenant (31:31-34) which Jeremiah's own consciousness of fellowship with God led him to see as the only true way to right conduct in practice and belief. That which Jeremiah himself through outward trial and inward struggle had proved true was possible for others."⁴² If the New Covenant was introduced in Jeremiah's day and the relationship which it involved was perfectly possible of attainment by him and those who followed his precepts and example, the New Testament "fulfilment" is practically denied.

Jer. 50:1-58. This prophecy which speaks so vividly of the coming downfall of Babylon is assigned by critics to "about 540 B.C." (the very end of the Exile!) because it "reflects like Isa. 40. ff. the historical situation just before the Medes overthrew Babylon, and expresses an attitude towards the latter very different from Jeremiah's own fifty years earlier." Consequently, it is to be inferred that "The compiler, or an editor of the Book, has (51:60) erred in attributing this long prophecy to Jeremiah."⁴³ The warrant for this statement is significant: "All Oracles or Narratives in the Book, which (apart from obvious intrusions) imply that the Exile is well advanced or that the return from Exile has already happened, or which reflect the circumstances of the Later Exile and subsequent periods or the spirit of Israel and the teaching of her prophets and scribes

⁴¹ Creelman, *Introduction*, p. 162.

⁴² *A New Commentary* ed. by Gore, Goudge, Guillaume, p. 487, cf. p. 506. The writer of the notes on Jeremiah (B. M. Pickering) does not make any reference to the N. T. interpretation of this passage. The writer of the notes on Hebrews (S. C. Gaylord) remarks: "Even in the time of Jeremiah the old covenant was aged and 'nigh unto vanishing away.' But the writer is thinking of his own time as well" (N. T. section, p. 614). For a similar view, cf. A. C. Welch, *Jeremiah*, pp. 229f.

⁴³ G. A. Smith, *Jeremiah*, p. 20.

in those periods, we may rule out of the material on which we can rely for our knowledge of Jeremiah's life and his teaching."⁴⁴ In other words the critic may *rule out* any material which does not fit into his theory regarding prophecy!

Ezekiel 24:1. For many years the Book of Ezekiel was practically immune from the disintegration which book after book of the Old Testament suffered at the hands of the critics. This was largely due to the fact that so many of the prophecies in the book are definitely dated. There are fourteen of these datings (usually the *day* of the *month* of the *year* is given) between the 5th and the 27th years of the captivity of Jehoiachin (592-570 B.C.). But if the heading of Isa. 13 is set aside and ignored, why should the headings in Ezekiel be regarded as trustworthy? So these headings are regarded as questionable and most or all of them are rejected by the more radical critics.⁴⁵ It is also stated repeatedly that Ezekiel belonged to the "captivity" and that he dwelt at or near the river Chebar. This gives his prophecies a definitely Babylonian setting. But if these statements are also set aside, it becomes possible to assert that Ezekiel lived in Jerusalem until its capture by Nebuchadnezzar. Thus 8:1-3 declares expressly that Ezekiel was brought to Jerusalem in vision; and 11:24 tells of his being brought back to Chaldea, to them of the captivity. But if the heading and the statements of 8:1-3 are rejected as spurious,⁴⁶ it then becomes possible to argue that Ezekiel was at Jerusalem and actually witnessed the scenes he describes in chaps. 8-11. If such a view is taken, and it must be taken if it is seriously held that Ezekiel was in Jerusalem till the fall of the city, then the words of 24:1f. lose practically all of their significance. For, if Ezekiel was in Jerusalem when the siege began, and not in far off Chaldea, he would not need a special revelation to tell him the day on which the siege began. He would be only too conscious of the fact as a matter of personal experience. It is by methods such as these that both the situation and the scope of even the most definite prophecies

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁴⁵ Two of the most radical are G. Hölscher and Wm. A. Irwin. Hölscher does not hesitate to say: "The Ezekiel Book is, in the form in which it lies before us, just as little a work of the prophet whose name it bears as all the Prophetical Books of the Canon, but it is a much edited work (*ein vielschichtiges Redaktionswerk*) in which the visions and the history of the Prophet Ezekiel form only the kernel (*Kern*)" (*Hesekiel*, p. 26 [1924]).

⁴⁶ Irwin is suspicious of all the headings. He classifies 8:1 as "certainly wrong" (*The Problem of Ezekiel*, 1943). Having rejected this heading, he argues from 11:14-25 that Ezekiel "is one of a mournful group numbered for exile after the city had at last fallen on that terrible day in 586" (p. 68f.).

can be changed, and a book like Ezekiel reduced to a collection of late and pseudonymous utterances.

Regarding Ezekiel it may be well to note that the complaint made to the prophet by the children of the captivity, i.e., by the men of his own time, his immediate audience was this: "The vision that he seeth is for many days *to come*, and he prophesieth of the times that are far off" (12:27f.). We observe also that in 33:33 the fulfilment of such long-range predictions is made the test of their genuineness: "And when this cometh to pass (lo, it will come) then shall they know that a prophet hath been among them." Strange words and a strange complaint, if the dictum of Davidson as to the function of the prophet is a correct and adequate one!

Daniel 9 contains a prediction which is dated in "the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the seed of the Medes" (v. 1) and is stated to have been made to a certain Daniel who "continued even unto the first year of king Cyrus" (1:21). This gives it, according to the Bible, an approximate date of 538 B.C. There has been much discussion as to the fulfilment of the prophecy. According to what may be called the "traditional" interpretation, the "Messiah" referred to in vv. 25f. is the Lord Jesus Christ. So understood the prediction extends to the First Advent and beyond it. The predictive element is thus very conspicuous in this prophecy. But, according to very many of the critics, the "Messiah" or "anointed one" referred to in this prophecy was the high priest Onias III who was murdered about 171 B.C.; and the termination of the Seventy Weeks was about 168 B.C. And this date, 168 B.C., is the date to which many of them assign the Book of Daniel.⁴⁷ Thus, by altering both the situation of the prophecy (making it Maccabean) and the fulfilment (denying its Messianic reference), the critics succeed in eliminating the predictive element in this wonderful prophecy with remarkable thoroughness.⁴⁸ By cutting off its head and its feet, as it were, they succeed in fitting it to the Procrustean bed of their theory that prophecy is not predictive!

⁴⁷ E.g., the *Westminster Study Edition*, p. 1257, cf. p. 1236.

⁴⁸ S. R. Driver held that the available evidence favored the conclusion "that the Book of Daniel was not written earlier than c. 300 B.C." (*Introduction* 1910, p. 509). He added this significant statement, "More than this can scarcely, in the present state of our knowledge, be affirmed *categorically*, except by those who deny the possibility of predictive prophecy." Such a statement as this, coming as it does from one held in high esteem in critical circles, makes it perfectly plain how prominently the question of the Supernatural figures in the setting of the year 168 B.C. as the date of Daniel by the majority of critical scholars.

What is true of Dan. 9 applies also to the other prophecies in this book. The dreams and visions in Chaps. 2, 7, 8, 10-12 are all stated to have been given to *Daniel* or interpreted by him; they are all dated more or less precisely; and in some cases the situation is definitely stated (5:1, 30; 8:2). All of these prophecies extend into the distant future. Thus, few if any critics will deny that the "he goat" of 8:5-8 is Alexander the Great. Consequently if this vision was seen by Daniel, as 8:1 definitely asserts, it and the others mentioned with it are prophecies whose horizon is the distant future. In the case of chap. 4, the fulfilment began "at the end of twelve months" (v. 29), while the doom pronounced on Belshazzar came true "in that night" (5:30). If the statements which make Daniel the recipient of these visions of dreams are true, predictive prophecy, long range prediction, is possible even from the standpoint of the critics who hold the book to be of Maccabean origin. But the late date of course is regarded as carrying with it the disproof that Daniel uttered any of these predictions.

The above examples, to which others might be added were it necessary, make it unmistakably clear that the claim of the critics that prediction figures only very slightly in prophecy can be made good only by the use of such decidedly drastic methods as the following: (1) Reject the *situation* of the prophecy, as defined in its Biblical context, and assign it to a date so near the so-called fulfilment, that the element of prediction is largely or wholly eliminated; (2) Tone down the prophecy either by cutting out or interpreting away its distinctive features so that the prediction becomes vague or general; (3) Treat the predictive element as simply a literary device employed to enable a contemporary or near-contemporary of the events described to speak with the authority of a prophetic voice from the distant past; (4) Insist that, in the case of all the prophetic books, "later editorial hands undoubtedly labored on the prophecies and brought the book to its present form,"⁴⁹ a claim which, if admitted, makes it quite uncertain what the prophet said, and what the successive revisers and editors of his utterances have made him say. It is only when the voice of prophecy has been silenced or muffled by the application of such methods as these that the desired result can be obtained. Prophecy then ceases to be predictive, because it ceases to be prophecy according to the *Bible* and has become prophecy according to the *Critics*.

Only those who are unfamiliar with the statements of the Bible itself will be impressed by the oft-repeated claim of the

⁴⁹ *Westminster Study Edition*, p. 1163.

critics that their theory regarding prophecy is based on a careful, objective, and scientific study of the Biblical data. When the Biblical witnesses are allowed to testify and their testimony, as recorded in the Bible, is accepted as trustworthy, the result is very different. It is in fact a complete *exposé* of the falsity of the claims of the critics.

EMPHASIS ON ORIGINAL MEANING

Closely related to the two outstanding features in the critical interpretation of Prophecy—situation and scope—which have just been considered, is the emphasis which is placed on the importance and even the necessity of determining the *original* meaning of a prophetic utterance, what it meant to the one who uttered it, what meaning it had for those who were the first to hear it; and to distinguish this primary meaning from the meaning which it has for later generations or acquires in the light of its fulfilment. Thus we are told: "Our first question must necessarily be: 'What meaning did the human author intend to be attached to his words?' and it is not until this question has been fairly faced and answered, that we can legitimately proceed to inquire what further significance may be attached to the words as forming part of the one great continuous revelation of God by the Spirit dividing to every man severally as He will."⁵⁰ This subject will be dealt with more fully in the next chapter. In this connection it will suffice to point out that it tends to draw a distinction, which may easily be developed into a radical difference, between what the prophet, as a man of his own time, speaking to the people of his own time, meant by his words and the meaning which later generations living under quite different conditions may have rightly or wrongly attached to them. When the prophet is viewed primarily as one who interprets the events of his own time to his *contemporaries*, the only "fulfilment" which future generations can find in his words for their day must consist in the bearing of the principles which he enunciated and of his estimate of the events through which he was passing on the changed conditions of a future far too remote for him to foresee it or to deal directly with its circumstances and its events. But so understood the prophet is practically transformed into a moral philosopher, whose predictions become little more than maxims which are applicable *mutatis mutandis* to every succeeding age.

⁵⁰ Edgehill, *An Enquiry into the Evidential Value of Prophecy*, p. 33. Cf. A. C. Zenos, art. "Prophecy" in *A New Standard Bible Dictionary*, p. 742.

CHAPTER II

PROPHECY ACCORDING TO THE BIBLE

To determine what is the Biblical conception of prophecy, we cannot do better than to turn to that passage in Deuteronomy (18:9-22) which speaks of the Prophet who is to come. The situation of this utterance is practically the same as that of chap. 28 which has been referred to above. Moses is speaking to the children of Israel, encamped in the land of Moab just before his death. The reference of the utterance is quite definitely to the future: "when thou art come into the land." Moses first warns his hearers against the "abominations" by means of which the inhabitants of the land which Israel is to possess have endeavored to know and if possible to control the future. Nine different methods used by them are enumerated. We do not know the exact nature of some of these practices nor the precise differences between them all. But the length of the list serves to stress a fact which both the Classics of Greece and Rome and, more recently, the spade of the archaeologist have made almost appallingly clear, how powerful and how dire was the spell which the thought of the unknown and yet inevitable future cast over the living and thinking of the men of the long ago. Ezekiel tells us in a vivid picture, how the king of Assyria used three different forms of divination (21:21) to determine the direction he should take when setting out on one of his many campaigns. No one of these is expressly mentioned here. But one of the three, "he looked into the liver," refers to a rite (*hepatoscopy*) which was very extensively used. A large number of omen texts dealing with this subject have been discovered. We might almost call it a science, irrational and absurd as it seems to us to be.¹

This impressive introduction to the prophecy illustrates the tremendous role which the problem of the future played in the ancient world in general and particularly among the peoples

¹ Cf. Isa. 47:9-13 and Jer. 27:9 which mention several of these practices. A striking illustration of the tremendous hold which such rites had over the men and women of antiquity is given in Vergil's description of the frenzied efforts of lovesick Dido to penetrate by means of divination the hidden future and to win the favor of the gods (*Aeneid* iv. 60-64). It may be freely rendered as follows:

"Dido, so lovely herself, in her right hand holding the chalice,
Pours out between the horns of the snow-white heifer libation.
Or she goes to the shrines of the gods, to altars of fatlings.
There she ceaselessly offers her gifts and breathlessly peering
Into their yawning breasts, she questions the quivering entrails."

whose land Israel was to possess. It also prepares most effectively for the disclosure of that better means of dealing with this vastly important and intriguing problem, which God is providing for His people. All the abominations of the heathen are to be rejected as worthless and evil, because "The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken."² With these words Moses describes briefly the nature of Biblical prophecy. The Lord will "raise up" the prophet, the prophet will be an Israelite, he will enjoy a position of intimacy with God and of authority with men such as only Moses has enjoyed (Nu. 7:89; 12:8).

It is important to observe that Moses takes occasion at this point to call attention to a significant and remarkable fact,—that the disclosure of the divine purpose which he is now making to Israel had already been made to him personally nearly forty years before at Sinai, when the people after hearing the proclamation of the Ten Commandments by the voice of God Himself, requested that they might not again hear God speaking directly to them lest they die (Ex. 20:19). No hint of this great revelation is given in the account of the majestic scene at Sinai. It was made known to Moses. But Israel did not need it so long as Moses was with them. Consequently, this prophecy may be said to have two *situations*: the situation at Sinai when the Lord revealed it to Moses, the situation in the land of Moab when Moses declared it to the people.

Having briefly explained the original occasion of the revelation which he now makes known to the people, Moses repeats and elaborates it. He begins with a word of commendation: "And the LORD said unto me, They have well spoken that which they have spoken." Such a spectacle as Israel had witnessed at Sinai was too awful, too appalling, to be the usual and customary method of making known the will of God to His people. So the Lord declares, "I will raise them up a prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee"; and He adds these words which express so clearly the function of the prophet: "and I will put my words in his mouth: and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him." This is the office of the prophet. He is a spokesman for God. And because he is a "man of God," who

²This is apparently the meaning of Num. 23:23, of which the best rendering seems to be: "For there is no divination in Jacob and no sorcery in Israel. According to the time [i.e., at the proper time, or, from time to time] it will be told to Israel and to Jacob what God is going to do [or "has done" in the sense of the prophetic perfect "will do"]."

speaks the "word of God," the Lord Himself will "require it" of the man who does not hearken to the voice of His messenger.

It is made quite clear in the New Testament that this prophecy regarding the prophet has had its full and final fulfilment in the Messiah (Acts 3:22; 7:37 cf. Jn. 1:21; 6:14; 7:40). But it is hardly less clear that it must also have reference in a lesser degree to that long line of prophetic men who came after Moses and were like Moses in this regard, that the Lord raised them up from among their brethren, put His word into their mouths, and commissioned them to declare unto His people all that He commanded them. The test of true prophecy given in vv. 20-24 makes this sufficiently clear. For if prophecy were to be restricted to the One Prophet of the future, it would have no reference at all to that most significant movement which was to figure for more than half a millennium so prominently in Israel's history—"the goodly fellowship of the prophets." It is significant that Peter, in appealing to the Old Testament in his sermon in Solomon's porch, directly connects Moses' prediction concerning the Prophet with the course of O.T. prophecy in general by adding the words: "Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days" (Acts 3:22-24).

On the other hand it is to be observed that while the words "like unto thee" have an application to and fulfilment in every prophet whom the Lord raised up to be His spokesman to His people, there is nevertheless an important difference in the mode of communication which is not to be overlooked. This is stated very definitely in Num. 12:1-8, where the difference between Moses and the prophets is made very clear. In the case of the ordinary prophet, so the Lord declares, "I will make myself known unto him in a vision, *and* will speak unto him in a dream."³ This mode of revelation is contrasted with the "mouth to mouth" communion which Moses enjoyed (7:89, cf. Deut. 34:10) and which was only fully realized in the perfect communion which Jesus had with the Father. A contrast is also drawn here between "apparently" or "manifestly" and "in dark speeches," which implies that there will be or may be an element

³ Elsewhere "dream" is hardly ever used of revelations received by the prophets (cf. Dan. 7:1). Dreams were given to Jacob, Joseph, Solomon, and doubtless to many others, also to Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar. It is also used of the "dreams" of the false prophets (Jer. 23:25-32). Several Hebrew words are rendered by "vision" in AV and RV. There seems to be little difference between them. The word used here (*mar'ah*) is found chiefly in Ezek. and Dan. The most frequently occurring word (*chazon*) is used in Isa. 1 and also in Ezek. and Dan.

of obscurity in the utterances of the prophets; and this we often find to be the case.⁴ It is to be noted further that the word "vision" is used of the prophecies of a number of the prophets, though it is more usual to speak of the "word," which the prophet declared from the Lord. *Seeing* and *hearing* were the two means by which the Lord communicated His will to the prophets. How close was the relationship between them is illustrated by the expression, "this is the word which the LORD hath shewed me (literally, caused me to see)" (Jer. 38:21).

What then is the Biblical conception of the function of the prophet? It is simply this, to declare to men the "word" which God places "in his mouth." He is a spokesman for God; and the only limitation placed upon his words is that they must be God's words.⁵ It is because of this that we constantly find the prophets introducing their messages by such impressive phrases as: "Thus saith the LORD," "The word of the LORD came unto me saying." It is the false prophets who speak words "out of their own heart" (Ezek. 13:2, 17). The true prophet is a "man of God" and it is his sole duty to declare the "word" of God, as God has revealed it to him, the "vision" which God has caused him to see.

THE SITUATION OF THE PROPHECIES

In view of the insistence of the critics on the importance, even the necessity, of determining the situation of every prophecy if its meaning and significance is to be properly understood, it is important to consider carefully the way in which this matter is dealt with in the Bible itself. If we turn to the Biblical record, and especially to the examples of predictive prophecy which were discussed in Chapter I, we observe such facts as the following:

(1) The prophecy may be *dated*. This dating may be precise: "in the fortieth year, in the eleventh month, on the first *day* of the month" (Deut. 1:3), "in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, which was the first year of Nebu-

⁴ Regarding the reticence and indefiniteness which often characterizes prophecy, Principal Fairbairn has well said: "And in nothing, perhaps, more than in this wonderful combination of darkness and light observable in the prophetic word—in the clear foreknowledge it displays, on the one hand, of the greater things to come in Providence, coupled, on the other, with only such indications of time and place as might be sufficient to stimulate inquiry, and ultimately dispel doubt, may we discern the directing agency of Him who knows our frame, and knows as well what is fit to be withheld as what is to be imparted in supernatural communications" (*Prophecy*, 2nd Eng. ed., pp. 180f.).

⁵ The basic test of all prophecy is stated clearly in Deut. 13:1-5, cf. Isa. 8:19f. The law of God as contained in essence in the Decalogue is the test of every "Thus saith the Lord."

chadnezzar king of Babylon" (Jer. 25:1), "in the five and twentieth year of our captivity, in the beginning of the year, in the tenth day of the month, in the fourteenth year after the city was smitten" (Ezek. 40:1). It may also be more or less indefinite or refer to events the date of which is now unknown: "in the days of Ahaz, the son of Jotham, king of Judah" (Isa. 7:1), "in the year that Tartan came unto Ashdod" (20:1), Merodach-baladan's embassy, "for he had heard that he had been sick, and was recovered" (39:1), "two years before the earthquake" (Amos 1:1, cf. Zech. 14:5).

(2) The *situation* or *occasion* may be made clear in various ways: Jacob is on his death bed (Gen. 49:1, 33), Israel is on the border of Moab (Num. 22:1), Hannah is rejoicing in giving Samuel to the Lord (1 Sam. 1:24-2:1), Saul's disobedience (1 Sam. 13:13f.), David's desire to build a house for the Lord (2 Sam. 7:1), Solomon's apostasy in his old age (1 Kgs. 11:11), Jeroboam's dedication (?) of the altar at Bethel (1 Kgs. 13:1), Ahab in Naboth's garden (1 Kgs. 21:18f.), Jehu's well-doing (2 Kgs. 10:30). Such passages as these suffice to show that according to the Bible itself many of the prophecies which it records had very definite situations and occasions; and we are often told more or less fully just what these occasions were. And it is especially to be noted that all of these situations indicate quite clearly that the prophecy which was then uttered was a prediction, that it concerned the future. Thus, we do not know just when the Naboth incident occurred, how long before Ahab's defeat and death. But we are told that Elijah's prediction of the downfall of his house and the awful end of Jezebel, a prediction which was not completely fulfilled for more than a decade after his death, was made to him by Elijah face to face.

(3) The *name* of the prophet may simply be given. In the case of such headings as "The vision of Obadiah," "The burden which Habakkuk the prophet did see," "The word of the Lord that came to Joel the son of Pethuel," we may assume that these men were well-known in their day, and that the mere mention of the name was sufficient to date their messages at least approximately. In such cases further information is given either in the book itself or elsewhere in Scripture. Thus, Habakkuk prophesied concerning the Chaldeans, Jonah lived in the time of Jeroboam II (2 Kgs. 14:25). Joel's position as the second of the Minor Prophets indicates an early date, although most critics favor a late one.

(4) The *period* during which the prophet lived and labored may be indicated. This is the case with Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea,

Micah, Zephaniah. In the case of these prophecies it has been customary to regard the heading as applying to the entire contents of the book at the head of which each is placed. It is only when these headings are ignored and the books are cut apart and the fragments regarded as independent or isolated utterances, that the claim of the critics that *anonymity* is characteristic of many or most of the prophetic utterances of the Old Testament becomes an "assured result" of the Higher Criticism.⁶ Isaiah, for example, only becomes a "little library" of prophecies, mostly anonymous, when the general heading is ignored and the book is split up into a hundred or more fragments, for each of which a "situation" must be found quite regardless of the general situation given in 1:1.

It is clear, then, that the Bible does attach importance to the authorship, date, and situation of the prophetic utterances which it records; and it attaches importance to them mainly, it would seem, for a reason which is quite obvious, because they are or may be *predictions*.

THE SCOPE OF THE PROPHECIES

The reader has of course noted that all of the examples of prophecy considered in Chapter I. were selected and discussed as examples of *predictive* prophecy. It is the predictive element which often makes the Biblical situation so important. For according to their Biblical situation these predictions reveal an insight into the future which clearly transcends anything that is possible to the dim and short-sighted vision of mortal man. As in the case of these prophecies the situation and authorship are sometimes defined more precisely than in others, but usually with sufficient definiteness to make it clear that they are predictive, so the *scope* of these prophecies may and does vary considerably. It may be "three-score and five years" (Isa. 7:8), "seventy years" (23:15; Jer. 25:11), "four generations" (2 Kgs. 10:30), "four hundred years" (Gen. 15:13). It may be quite short: "three years" (Isa. 16:14; cf. 20:3), "within a year"

⁶ Each of the books comprising the Latter Prophets (Isaiah to Malachi), even the smallest of them (Obadiah) bears at least the name of an individual as its author. About a score of other prophets are mentioned by name in the other books of the Old Testament, e.g., Ahijah, Elijah, Nathan, Shemaiah. Anonymity is exceptional in the case of a prophet whose words are recorded (e.g., 1 Kgs. 13:1). It is quite true that we know relatively little about most of these prophets, only the little that the Bible tells us. But that does not make them anonymous. We do not know whether the Sosthenes of 1 Cor. 1:1 is the same person as the chief ruler of the synagogue mentioned in Acts 18:17. But Paul and the Christians at Corinth undoubtedly knew; and we cannot justly hold them responsible for our ignorance.

(21:16), "tomorrow" (2 Kgs. 7:1). It may be less definite as to time, yet precise as to the event (1 Kgs. 13:1f.). It may have its fulfilment in a definite event or series of events (Isa. 13:1, cf. v. 17) or it may state a principle of the divine government which may have several or many fulfilments (Deut. 28). It may also, and this is the great burden of prophecy, refer to the Messianic age and have its fulfilment in it, as the New Testament frequently asserts that it has done (Isa. 7:14, cf. Matt. 1:22f.; Mic. 5:2, cf. Matt. 2:5f.; Ps. 110:1, cf. Matt. 22:41-46).

It is quite evident (Deut. 18:9-14), that one reason for the powerful appeal which the religions of their neighbors made upon the Israelites is to be found in this very fact, that they claimed to be able to satisfy this craving for knowledge of coming events which is so natural to man as he faces the unknown but inevitable future. Consequently, appeal to heathen gods or the use of divination is treated as an affront to the God of Israel which He will "require" of the guilty (Dt. 18:19). Ahaziah of Israel was ill and naturally desired to know whether his case was hopeful or not. So he sent to inquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron (2 Kgs. 1:2). This provoked Elijah's indignant and wrathful words: "Is it because there is no God in Israel, that ye go to inquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron?" This stated the issue definitely and sharply. Elijah stigmatized Ahaziah's act as treason and apostasy. The final act of disobedience which marked the tragic career of Saul was that when the Lord answered him neither "by dreams, by Urim, or by prophets" (1 Sam. 28:6), all of them proper and legitimate ways of ascertaining the future, he resorted to a woman with a familiar spirit to learn the result of the coming battle with the Philistines (1 Chr. 10:13f.). Isaiah answers the suggestion that the men of his day resort to these unlawful means of learning the future with the words: "Should not a people seek unto their God? for the living *should they seek* unto the dead?" (Isa. 8:19). And we should not forget that this desire to know the future, which was so keenly felt in ancient times, is just as strong today. Astrology, palmistry, crystal-gazing, ouija boards, spiritualism and its seances, have a strange fascination for multitudes of so-called modern-minded people. Where true Christian faith is feeble or wholly absent, superstitions, even the most absurd, tend to appear and to flourish. To endeavor, therefore, to minimize the importance of the element of prediction or to eliminate it from the prophecies of the Bible as the critics are constantly endeavoring to do is to seek to get rid of those very things which respond to the deepest longings of mankind and to turn them back to

those false and abominable ways which are so strongly denounced in the Bible, which points out so plainly the other and better way.

THE VIEWPOINT OF THE PROPHET

As soon as it is recognized that the future figured prominently in the utterances of the prophets, it becomes important to observe carefully the different ways in which these coming events are spoken of by them. Sometimes they referred to them quite definitely as future events. We have already noted that such expressions as "behold the days are coming" are frequently used by them. But it is easy to understand that men who like the prophets were constantly thinking in terms of the future and regarded the visions of coming events which they received from God as certain of fulfilment because revealed to them by God Himself, might at times become so absorbed in the future and so engrossed with its events and see them so vividly presented to their spiritual sight as to speak of these future events as if they were living among them and these things were actually transpiring before their eyes. The very vividness of such visions of the future would make this both natural and likely. A striking example is Jer. 4:23-26: "I beheld the earth, and, lo, it was without form, and void; and the heavens and they *had* no light. I beheld the mountains, and, lo, they trembled, and all the hills moved lightly. I beheld, and, lo, there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens were fled. I beheld, and, lo, the fruitful field *was* a wilderness, and all the cities thereof were broken down at the presence of the LORD, *and* by his fierce anger." The prophet is describing what he has seen. Four times the ominous "I beheld" is repeated. He has seen with his own eyes a devastation so terrible that he describes it in terms which suggest a return to primitive chaos. Yet he goes on at once to say: "For thus saith the LORD, The whole land shall be a desolation; yet will I not make a full end." Whether this cataclysm is imminent and at the hands of the Scythians, or whether the prophet is speaking of a far greater overthrow of which the Scythian peril is but a type, he does not tell us. To what extent it may be eschatological, we do not know. The important point is that the prophet has seen a vision of this terrible calamity and describes it as if it had already taken place; while at the same time declaring that he is speaking of the future, of things to come. To this vivid way of describing future events is due a feature of the Biblical style which is called the *Prophetic Perfect*.

THE PROPHETIC PERFECT

In Hebrew the perfect tense is ordinarily used to describe past events or actions. Such events are "perfect," because completed

(perfected) in the past or at the time of speaking. But we often find in the language of prophecy that the perfect tense is used to describe events which lie in the future. This is the case because, from the standpoint of the purpose of God of which they are the declaration, their occurrence is to be regarded as so certain that they can be spoken of as "perfect," as if they had already taken place. S. R. Driver, a leading critical scholar in his day, has described this "as the most special and remarkable use of the tense." He says of it, ". . . its abrupt appearance in this capacity imparts to descriptions of the future a forcible and expressive touch of reality, and reproduces vividly the certainty with which the occurrence of a yet future event is contemplated by the speaker. Sometimes the perfect appears thus only for a single word; sometimes, as though nothing more than an ordinary series of past historical events were being described, it extends over many verses in succession: continually the series of perfects is interspersed with the simple future forms, as the prophet shifts his point of view, at one moment contemplating the events he is describing from the *real standpoint* of the present, at another moment looking back upon them as accomplished and done, and so viewing them from an *ideal position* in the future."⁷ In view of the claim so insistently made by the critics, among whom Driver held high rank, that the position or situation of the prophet must always be actual and real, that he cannot speak from the viewpoint of a future and "non-existent situation," the above statement is worthy of very careful pondering. For it amounts to a very definite admission that the language of prophecy differs from that of history in this very respect, that the prophet may and often does speak from the standpoint of the future and in so doing describes things future as though they were already past.

The occurrence of this *prophetic perfect* is somewhat obscured for the English reader by the fact that it is sometimes rendered in the English versions by the present or future tense. Thus, in Num. 24:17 "a star has come out of Jacob" is the correct rendering. But since the perfect is followed by futures, both AV and ARV render it by the future, "there shall come (forth) a Star." Isa. 5:13 begins with the perfect, "therefore my people have gone into captivity." But in v. 14 the natural rendering is "shall descend"; and many scholars regard the captivity referred to as still future. Isa. 9:1ff. has a series of perfects: "has seen . . . light has shined upon them . . . they rejoiced . . . thou hast

⁷ *Hebrew Tenses* (3rd ed.), pp. 18f. Most of the examples which follow will be found in Driver.

broken . . . a child has been born . . . a son has been given . . . and his name has been called . . ." Yet the events described are clearly future. Regarding the vivid picture of the advance of the Assyrian given in Isa. 10:28-32, Duham, one of the radical critics of Isaiah, has said: "Despite the perfects it deals not with a past but a future occurrence." In Isa. 24:4-12 the perfect tense is used nearly always (24 out of 28 times). Note especially "the city of confusion has been broken down" (v. 10).⁸ In 28:2 "has cast down" (AV, "shall") represents the destruction of Samaria as already taken place. But the perfect is followed by the future, "shall be trodden under foot." We find exactly the same thing in the Second Part of Isaiah. In 43:14 we read "For your sake I have sent to Babylon, and have brought down all their nobles . . ." In Isa. 45:17 we are told "Israel has been saved in the LORD with an everlasting salvation"; and in 46:1f. the humiliation of the gods of Babylon is pictured as already taken place, "Bel has bowed down . . . they themselves have gone into captivity." Similarly in 48:20 the exiles are commanded to go forth from Babylon and to proclaim these glorious tidings to the ends of the earth (land): "The LORD hath redeemed his servant Jacob." Yet according to the critical viewpoint, the prophet regards the fall of Babylon as still future though very near at hand!⁹

Jeremiah's prophecy of the downfall of Babylon (chaps. 50-51) is cast in a similar mould. It begins with a burst of triumph, "Declare ye among the nations, and publish, and set up a standard; publish *and* conceal not: say, Babylon is taken, Bel is confounded, Merodach is broken in pieces; her idols are confounded, her images are broken in pieces." And the reason is given: "For out of the north there has come up (not, "cometh up," A.V.) a nation against her." Compare, "How is the hammer

⁸ With what lively and confident expectancy the prophet looks forward to the time of blessing which is to follow the chastening is illustrated by Isa. 14:4f. and 26:1-6 where he even puts on the lips of those who will live in those glorious future days a "proverb" or taunt song, or a song of thanksgiving and praise which will be suited to the occasion. According to G. L. Robinson, "The prophet's fundamental standpoint in chs. 24-27 is the same as that of 2:2-4 and 13:23. Yet the prophet not infrequently throws himself forward into the remote future, oscillating backward and forward between his own times and those of Israel's restoration. It is especially noteworthy how he sustains himself in a long and continued transportation of himself to the period of Israel's redemption" (Article "Isaiah" in *Intern. Stand. Bible Encyc.*, p. 1499).

⁹ In *Isaiah, His Life and Times* (1888), Driver argues that the transference to the future is only "momentary" and furnishes no analogy for such "sustained transference to the future as would be implied if these chapters were by Isaiah" (pp. 186f.). G. A. Smith, *The Book of Isaiah* (vol. ii., p. 9) takes the same attitude. This means that the validity of the principle is to be admitted but its application to Isa. 40-66 is to be denied.

of the whole earth cut asunder and broken! How is Babylon become a desolation among the nations!" (v. 23), "Babylon is suddenly fallen and destroyed; howl for her" (51:8), "How is Sheshach taken" (vv. 41f.), cf. vv. 55, 56. Here we have a striking intermingling of prophetic past, present, and future, which gives the description remarkable vividness. The method of presentation obviously resembles Isa. 40-48 to a remarkable degree. Yet it is definitely stated in 51:64, "Thus far *are* the words of Jeremiah." And Jeremiah probably died in Egypt before the death of Nebuchadnezzar whose invasion of Egypt in 568 B.C. twenty years after the fall of Jerusalem was definitely foretold by the prophet (43:8-13).

The use of the Prophetic Perfect is very striking in certain of the Psalms. The 2nd Psalm describes a revolt of the "kings of earth," which is actually taking place. "Why have the nations raged?" It is a raging already begun and still continuing. "Why do they rage?" Their counsels are vividly described: "Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us." It is all in vain. For the Lord declares: "I have set my king upon my holy hill of Zion." The king declares the contents of the decree: "Thou art my Son. This day [today] have I begotten thee." And in view of the irresistible might promised to Him, the rebels are exhorted to submission, prompt and abject: "Be wise now therefore O ye kings . . . Kiss the Son, lest he be angry." Clearly the writer is describing these events as one who is living in the midst of them. Yet this language describes a world-wide revolt; and there is no psalm in the entire Psalter which is quoted more frequently than this one, or referred more definitely for its fulfilment to New Testament times. Its "today," so Paul tells us, was fulfilled in the resurrection of Christ (Acts 13:33, cf. Rom. 1:4). The same applies to the 110th Psalm. The imperatives "sit . . . rule" make the situation as vividly present as is the case in Ps. 2. Yet in vv. 5f. we read twice "has smitten . . . has smitten." Consequently, we are told, according to the critical interpretation, "The point which is usually emphasized most strongly is that a contemporary king is addressed, not a future king foretold."¹⁰ Yet this psalm is treated in the New Testament as both Davidic and Messianic. Ps. 22 uses the Prophetic Perfect repeatedly to describe the sufferings of the Afflicted. In this respect it closely resembles Isaiah 53, as we shall see presently. To what extent it describes the actual sufferings of the Psalmist, David, according to the heading, we

¹⁰ Baethgen, *Die Psalmen*, p. 336.

cannot say. But that it had a fuller and a Messianic import is made quite clear in the New Testament (Matt. 27:35).¹¹

The above examples make it clear that there is a marked tendency for the language of prophecy to refer to future events, even events lying in a distant future, as already past. Sometimes the change back to the use of the future tense is made very soon. Sometimes the perfect is used more or less consistently throughout the entire description. If this is admitted—it is hard to see how it can be denied—the only question of importance is as to the extent to which the prophet can maintain this ideal viewpoint; and this can only be determined by a careful induction based on all the relevant passages. For the moment, it is sufficient to observe that the data we have just been examining make it quite obvious that the sweeping assertion that the prophet must always speak from the standpoint of his own time and that the situation of a prophecy can only be determined by the events and circumstances which it describes and the way in which it describes them, must be very greatly modified, if it is to be brought into harmony with the evidence that the language of prophecy may and does differ quite appreciably from that of history in this very respect, that it can speak of future events as if they had already taken place.

THE ORIGINAL MEANING OF PROPHECY

In view of the emphasis placed by the critics upon the *original meaning* of the words of the Prophets, by which is meant, the meaning which his words had for the prophet himself and the meaning which he intended his hearers to draw from them, it is important to examine carefully the attitude of the Bible as a whole to this question. When we do so, we discover that ordinarily the Bible makes no distinction between what the prophet said and what he meant. Rather it allows and expects us to infer *his* meaning and *the* meaning of his words from what he actually said. Thus we read that Elisha said to the king's favorite, who openly challenged the prophet's promise of plenty for the starving people of Samaria, "Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof" (2 Kgs. 7:2). We are left completely in the dark as to exactly what his words meant to Elisha himself, to the king, to his favorite, or to the people who heard them. Did Elisha realize that he was predicting the death of the king's favorite? Did the king realize that he was placing his favorite in a position which would lead to his destruction,

¹¹ A. F. Kirkpatrick, *The Psalms*, p. 114.

or did he perhaps think that he was placing him in a position of honor which would make the threat of the prophet meaningless or ineffectual? Did the people who trod on the favorite in the gate realize that they were fulfilling the prophecy to the letter? We cannot answer one of these interesting and intriguing questions with certainty. Yet here we have a prediction which fulfills every condition laid down by Davidson. The prophet is dealing with an actual present situation. He is speaking as a man of his own time to the men of his own time and of a matter which is of great importance to them. And the death of the favorite even more than the unexpected plenty at which he scoffed, was the signal proof that what Elisha foretold was "the word of the LORD." Yet we cannot even be sure that the death of the favorite was any less of a surprise to Elisha than it clearly must have been to the king.

We may ask the same questions regarding the Prayer of Hannah, which we have already discussed in a different connection. Hannah's concluding words are these: "The LORD shall judge the ends of the earth; and he shall give strength unto his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed." The Bible tells us plainly and definitely that Hannah uttered these words. It does not tell us what she meant by them, or what she understood them to mean. It does not tell us who heard her utter them, or who recorded them. It does not tell us whether she lived to see her son anoint Saul to be king of Israel, or whether she learned of the anointing of David. We may hesitate to say that she realized the full meaning of her words. There is not entire unanimity even today among scholars as to their full import. What we are told is simply that she uttered them. Consequently, when the critics tell us that such an utterance is quite out of keeping with Hannah's situation and spiritual insight and must date from a far later period, they are denying what the Bible expressly affirms; and they are presuming to know far more about Hannah and her circumstances than can possibly be the case.

In Jer. 3:16 we read these amazing words: "And it shall come to pass, when ye be multiplied and increased in the land, in those days, saith the LORD, they shall no more say, The ark of the covenant of the LORD: neither shall it come to mind: neither shall they remember it; neither shall they visit it; neither shall that be done any more." This is one of the most remarkable prophecies in the whole Old Testament. What did Jeremiah mean by it? Did he foresee that the ark would not return from Babylon, at the close of the seventy-year captivity which he was

later to foretell, that unlike the golden candlestick, it would not be among the 5400 vessels of gold and silver which Sheshbazzar would bring up from Babylon to Jerusalem? Did he realize that he was speaking of that far distant time, of which our Lord spake to the woman at the well, when all over the world the true worshippers would worship the Father in spirit and in truth (Jn. 4:23)? If so, how did he reconcile such a prediction with the one recorded in 17:19-27 where temple worship at Jerusalem in future days is described in some detail? The only hint which is given us as to what Jeremiah understood by his words is in the further declaration of 3:17 that all Jerusalem shall be called "the throne of the LORD," which means apparently that the holy city shall become a vast holy of holies where the Lord shall dwell in the midst of a holy people even as He had dwelt, or sat enthroned above the ark and between the cherubim, in the holy of holies of the tabernacle and the temple (Zech. 14:20f). But just how much of the meaning and implications of this tremendous utterance the prophet himself appreciated and understood it is impossible for us to determine with any degree of accuracy.

There are at least three things which must be considered as bearing on this question as to the meaning which the prophet himself attached to the prophetic word which was revealed to him.

(1) The Bible as a rule is very reticent as to the feelings and ideas and opinions which the recipients of divine truth entertained with regard to it. The account of the command given to Abraham to sacrifice his son and of Abraham's obedience is amazingly brief. As to the command itself we are told only that it was given to "test" Abraham. What Abraham thought of this command, the agony of mind which it caused him, how far he understood its purpose, and how far he succeeded in reconciling it with the promise which had been made to him and which centred in Isaac—of this the Genesis account tells us almost nothing. The command, the obedience, and the consequences of the obedience are allowed to speak for themselves. In Ezek. 24 the death of the prophet's wife is foretold and we read, "So I spake unto the people in the morning: and at even my wife died; and I did in the morning as I was commanded." Then we read the reason for the singular command given to the prophet. The event is recorded so briefly and so objectively, that some commentators hold that we are dealing here not with an actual occurrence but with a parable or vision. Whether such is the case or not, the important fact is that the prophet was told

to do something and he did it. How he felt about it and how fully he appreciated its significance is a secondary matter.

(2) It is also to be remembered that the New Testament tells us quite plainly that the Old Testament prophets did not at times fully understand the meaning of the words which they uttered. They "inquired and sought diligently" the meaning of the things which the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify; and it was made plain to them that in speaking of these things they were ministering to generations yet unborn (1 Pet. 1:10f.). In the first chapter of Hebrews, for example, the writer forms a catena of passages from the Old Testament to show the utter uniqueness of the Son of God. How fully the writers of the Old Testament passages appreciated their Messianic significance and implications may not be clear to us. But the inspired New Testament writer finds it there, and gives us the New Testament meaning of Old Testament Scripture. And it is this New Testament significance which is especially important to the New Testament Christian.¹²

(3) The New Testament also makes it clear that the Old Testament prophets and inspired writers sometimes at least knew far more of the meaning and implication of their words than we would otherwise suppose to be the case. One of the most signal illustrations of this is given us in Peter's Speech on the day of Pentecost. In this great address which is made up so largely of quotations from the Old Testament Peter tells us for example regarding the 16th Psalm not only that its closing words have their fulfilment in the resurrection of Christ, but that David who uttered them, *being a prophet* and "seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption" (Acts 2:31). In other words David was not speaking of his own resurrection, but of that of the great Scion of his house in Whom alone the endless duration promised to his kingship could be realized (2 Sam. 7:13, 16, 24, 25, 29). Yet according to most if not all of the critics, such a belief would have been an utter anachronism in the case of David, an idea quite incompatible with their entire theory of the development in Israel of the doctrine of life after death and of resurrection. In view of this fact we need to remember that Jesus said to the Jews, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it and was glad"

¹²The matter has been well stated by B. B. Warfield, "What Jesus and the writers of the New Testament saw in the Messianic references of the Psalms, it is natural that those who share their viewpoint should also see in them" ("The Divine Messiah in the Old Testament," *Princeton Theol. Rev.*, vol. xiv, p. 373).

(Jn. 8:56). These are wonderfully suggestive words; and we get some idea of their meaning when we study the comment on Gen. 22 which is given us in Heb. 11. It has been charged that Abraham simply lied when he said to his servants: "Abide ye here with the ass: and I and the lad will go yonder and worship and come again to you" (v. 5). But in Hebrews the real state of Abraham's mind is described in the words: "accounting that God was able to raise him up even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure" (11:19). This inspired interpretation gives us an amazing insight into the mind of Abraham; and it shows us that Abraham's sublime obedience was the result of a sublime faith, which made the obedience possible and to us understandable. Such an example as this should make the Bible student hesitate to assert too positively or definitely just what the Old Testament prophets must have meant or cannot have meant by their words or what they understood them to mean.

If we take Abraham as an example and study his life carefully, we will conclude that Abraham was a man of his own time who accepted its standards and even failed to live up to them (Gen. 20:9), and *also* that Abraham was a man who was far ahead of his time and that the revelations which were made to him are still marching on to their fulfilment. The words, "in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed," may have meant much or little to Abraham. They were, we know, like a closed book to generations of his descendants; and when his great descendant Paul the Apostle to the Gentiles spoke of the time of their fulfilment as already arrived by quoting the words of the command given him by the risen and ascended Christ, "Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles," his brethren of the seed of Abraham lifted up their voices and said, "Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live" (Acts 22:22). The question is not what these wonderful words meant to Abraham, but what they were intended to mean by Him who declared them unto him.

THE ISSUE

It appears then that the basic issue between the advocates of the Biblical and the Critical conceptions of Prophecy can be reduced to this all-important question. Are we to accept the situation, the scope, and the meaning which the Bible assigns to the predictions which it records, insofar as these are definitely stated, and to determine our conception of the nature of prophecy

in conformity with the requirements and implications of the Biblical data? Or must we disregard the Biblical situation entirely, reject the statements of the Bible as to authorship, situation, and scope and assign to each utterance the situation which seems to suit it best, *it being assumed that the element of prediction is to be allowed to figure only very little if at all in deciding the question as to the identity of the speaker or the situation which was the occasion of his words?* It is the *Biblical* situation of such prophecies as have been discussed, and the *Biblical* fulfilment of these prophecies, which leads inevitably to the traditional belief that *prediction* is an important element in prophecy. It has been the aim of the critics for many years to discredit and destroy this belief. And the extremes to which they are forced to go in order to accomplish this end are the clearest evidence that the traditional view of prophecy is the truly Biblical one. We meet this problem again and again as we study the prophetic books of the Old Testament, but nowhere more clearly and unavoidably than in the Book of Isaiah.

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