

CHAPTER NINE

OUTLINES OF PROPHETIC STUDY

HOW are we to study prophecy? First of all, let us study the *chronology* of the subject. I do not mean to say that this can be done entirely apart from, and previous to, some amount of attention to the details; but still our first object should be to give most careful heed to the chronological parts, and to make our study of details bear upon this especially.

In studying prophecy, just as in studying history, we can make but inconsiderable progress without chronology, or, at least, without some chronological method to keep us from confusion and entanglement. Many a foolish prophetic interpretation might have been avoided, had this been attended to. We may, perhaps, be able to strike out some ingenious and correct interpretations of particular passages or visions, and to be able to say that such and such events are, some time or other, to fall out in the future, or have fallen out in the past history of our earth, but how, or when, or in what order, we can with difficulty contrive even to guess. We read of a variety of events which future times are to witness; of the restoration and conversion of the Jews, the coming of the Son of man, the destruction of the apostate nations, the downfall of Antichrist, the first resurrection, the kingdom of the saints; and perhaps we have a tolerably correct idea of them as *isolated* events. But without some sort of chronology or system of arrangement, we can have no more. If we would construct our prophetic map with correctness, we must first sketch our outline, and lay down our latitudes and longitudes. Our telescope must be adjusted to its proper focus before we can expect to have a distinct and regular view of the scene to which it is directed.

The chronology of prophecy ought, then, to have a prominent place in our prophetic enquiries. In proportion to the correctness of

our views on this point, will be our success in dealing with the details of the subject. Many, we are aware, deny this; they look upon individual prophecies as dark, and upon their chronology as darker still; and hence they cannot conceive of that which is dark being illustrated by that which is darker. They seem to regard most prophecies, especially those which involve chronology, as little better than well-constructed riddles, affording a fair field for ingenious exposition and amusing arithmetical conjectures. They can see little in them but vague, unclassified statements, capable of any meaning or order, according to the ingenuity or caprice of the expositor, and are disposed to think that the best that can be said of them is, that they were not *intended* to be understood or arranged. They read the Scriptures, but it is with no expectation of thoroughly understanding them, and are content to pick up here or there a few bright gems, all the rest remaining confused and shadowy.

But there is more system in the Bible than these suppose; and not in part of it only, but in all; historical, doctrinal, prophetic. It is by no means difficult to trace throughout them the existence of a plan most regular and well constructed. It may astonish some to be told this; and to be told, moreover, that it would be difficult for a series of prophecies to be given in symbolical language more plain and systematic than those which the Spirit of God has conveyed to the Church in the books of Daniel, the "man greatly beloved," and John, the "beloved disciple." Any careful reader will see that the prophecies they contain are strictly chronological; and that in two respects; both because they preserve a regular order and succession of events in all their details, and because, by many hints thrown in here and

there, they give us data for fixing the general period within which the specified events are to occur, and for determining their commencement, duration, and close. This is one of the advantages we possess in studying the visions of Daniel and John. We have merely to interpret what is already arranged. In other prophecies, as those of Isaiah, Jeremiah, or Ezekiel, there is little order of succession observed. Events are not detailed so regularly one after the other, nor are their several parts always knit together. We have to search about for links by which to fasten them to each other, so that they may be fully classified and arranged; but in Daniel and John much of this is already done.

In return for this advantage which the chronological possess over the detached or irregular prophecies, there is a disadvantage, if we may call it so, connected with the former from which the latter are free; and that is, that the former are generally conveyed in symbolical language, while the language of the latter is more literal, and approaching, in many places, the style of history. In Daniel, for instance, we have the vision of the great image, in which we have concise views of four great monarchies which were successively to appear on the earth, from the times of the prophet to the setting up of the kingdom of the Son of man. In this we have nothing to *arrange*, for this is already done by the prophet himself; we have simply to interpret; but then there is a difficulty compensating for this, for the language is symbolical. I do not say that in this particular vision there is much to perplex, for so much of it has been fulfilled that most of the difficulties have been cleared away; I give it merely as an instance of the greater difficulties which, previous to its fulfillment, would have attended it from the nature of its language. Let us look into the predictions themselves.

In the second chapter of Daniel occurs the first of them. It is the vision of the majestic image. Its head is of gold, and denotes the Babylonian empire, of which Nebuchadnezzar was the head, whose throne was in "the golden city," and with whom began the "times of the Gentiles." Then there are breast and arms, which were silver, inferior to the first, the

kingdom of the Medes and the Persians. Then there are the belly and thighs of brass, a kingdom still inferior to the two former, the Macedonian. Then there are the legs of iron, and the feet of mingled iron and clay; this is the Roman empire, strong as iron, breaking all things in pieces that stood up against it. Such was that empire in its early days, in its Pagan state, at the first coming of Christ. It had not passed into the condition of the "feet and toes" of mingled clay and iron; that is, it was not then subdivided into ten kingdoms, and these entirely diverse and incongruous in their nature. For centuries after the first coming of Christ, it remained undivided in its strength. When the sub-division began, I do not now discuss. It is sufficient to say that there was no vestige of it for two or three centuries at least. And this is demonstration that the falling of the *STONE* upon it could not be the first coming of Christ; for that coming was not for destruction at all; and, moreover, the empire had not attained its divided state, so that the stone could fall upon its feet and crush its clay-iron toes. Beyond all doubt, then, "the stone that smote the image upon its feet, breaking them in pieces, and then becoming a great mountain, filling the whole earth," must refer to some event connected with the *second* coming of Christ; as it is written, "In the days of those kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed." This is the termination of the "times of the Gentiles," which began with the reign of Nebuchadnezzar; and such is a skeleton of the world's history from that day, till the coming of Christ, and the setting up of the better kingdom. It is an unbroken period of Gentile dominion and Jewish oppression till the day of the Son of man. It is obvious, then, that the Millennium or kingdom must be after the Advent, and not before it. There is no room for a thousand years' blessedness between the destruction of the Roman empire and the coming of the Lord, inasmuch as *that empire is to be destroyed by the Lord at His coming*.

Take another chronological prophecy, that of the seven trumpets of the Apocalypse. I do not here interpret, I merely sketch. The period occupied by these trumpets is not nearly so long

as that of the former vision to which I have been referring. They take up a mere section of history, the commencement of which I do not undertake to determine. The first trumpet sounds, and fiery hail descends, mingled with blood. The second trumpet sounds, and the great mountain of fire is cast into the sea. The third angel sounds, and the great star falls from heaven, turning the waters into wormwood. The fourth angel sounds, and the sun, moon, and stars are smitten, so that the third part of them is darkened. The fifth angel sounds, and the bottomless pit is opened, and the locusts arise out of it to lay waste the earth. The sixth angel sounds, and the four angels bound in Euphrates are loosed for slaughter. The seventh trumpet sounds, and the kingdoms of the earth become Christ's kingdom, and their many crowns are placed upon His head. This is the time of *judgment*, the time of *resurrection*, the time of recompense to the saints, as it is written, Rev. 11:17—

“We give thee thanks,
 Lord God Almighty!
 Which art, and wast, and art to come,
 For thou hast taken to thee thy great
 power,
 And hast reigned!
 And the nations were angry,
 And thy wrath is come,
 And the time of the dead
 That they should be judged.”

In all this there is a distinct succession of events in chronological order from the sounding of the first trumpet to the coming of the Lord, the resurrection, and the kingdom. Where, then, is there room for a millennium before this? How could it be thrust in between the sounding of the last trumpet and the Lord's coming?

Let us select a single specimen of discursive prophecies. They take up only sections or portions of history, and are to be regarded as *episodes* in the chronological prophecies. When we can ascertain their place in that chronology, or at least discover somewhat of their connexion and order, they of course possess the advantages of both kinds of prophecy. The following is such. It is the twenty-fourth

chapter of Isaiah. It refers to the last scenes of this present age, which are immediately to precede the coming of the Lord, and describes the state of earth in those days of darkness and tumult and error. The first ten verses describe the desolation which is to overwhelm the earth because of iniquity. In the midst of this overflowing wickedness, there is heard the voice of praise from a remnant in the distant isles, “Glory to the Righteous One.” But this is drowned in the abounding iniquity, and the prophet thus proceeds:—

“The earth is utterly broken down,
 The earth is clean dissolved,
 The earth is moved exceedingly,
 The earth shall reel to and fro like a
 drunkard,
 And shall be removed like a cottage;
 For her iniquity lieth heavy upon her;
 And she shall fall and rise no more.”

Such is the state of the earth as here described, a state which corresponds to that predicted by Peter in the third chapter of his Second Epistle. The conflagration which is to destroy the wicked and purify the soil, has, as it were, already taken hold of it, and accordingly the small remnant spoken of in verse 15, are said to glorify the Lord “in the fires.” This proceeds till the earth is “clean dissolved,”—till the curse has been burned out of her, and she is ready for being the seat of the perfect kingdom. This chapter is a complete answer to the objection usually taken to the Premillennial Advent from the conflagration mentioned in Second Peter. Isaiah's picture of the dissolving earth is far more complete, universal, and minute than Peter's: his expressions also, denoting destruction,—utter destruction,—are far stronger, yet we find that during all the time of this terrible catastrophe and conflagration, there is a people preserved alive upon the earth, a remnant who are kept from the danger, as well as a multitude on whom the judgments descend in overwhelming vengeance. The vision then proceeds:—

“And it shall come to pass in that day,
 Jehovah shall punish the host of the high
 ones that are on high,
 And the kings of the earth upon the
 earth.”

Here then is a twofold vengeance foretold;
 first upon the host of the high ones that are on
 high—that is, the principalities and powers of
 darkness, the “prince of the power of the air,”
 and the spiritual wickednesses that are in “the
 high places.” Then comes the punish-ment of
 earth, its kings and its inhabitants, as elsewhere
 set forth in the second Psalm:—

“They shall be gathered together,
 As prisoners are gathered in the pit:
 They shall be shut up in the prison,
 And after many days shall they be
 visited.”

We recognize at once here the casting of the
 beast and false prophet into the lake of fire, as
 described in Rev. 19, and the binding of Satan
 as given in chap. xx. Isaiah says, “After many
 days shall they be visited;” and John says,
 “When the thousand years are expired, Satan
 shall be loosed out of his prison.” But let us
 mark what takes place in the interval, that is,
 between their being cast into the pit and their
 being visited:—

“Then the moon shall be confounded,
 And the sun ashamed,
 When Jehovah of hosts shall reign
 In Mount Zion and in Jerusalem,
 And before his ancients gloriously.”

For we know what signs are to be in heaven
 and in the earth, in the sun and moon and stars,
 in that great and notable day. And then comes
 the song of Israel or of the Church in the
 succeeding chapter, a song like that of Moses
 and Miriam after the destruction of Egypt and
 its chivalry, when they sank like lead in the
 mighty waters.

And after this song of exultation over their
 enemy, they strike the festal note; a note in
 unison with that which they sing at the
 marriage-supper of the Lamb; a song of festival;

a song of resurrection-joy and glory, in the
 presence of their God and King:—

“In this mountain
 Shall Jehovah make for all people
 A feast of fat things.

And in this mountain
 Shall he destroy
 The face of the covering cast over all
 people,
 And the vail that is spread over all
 nations.
 He will swallow up death in victory;
 The Lord Jehovah shall wipe away tears
 From off all faces;
 And the rebuke of his people shall he
 take
 From off all the earth;
 For Jehovah hath spoken it.”

These specimens will furnish the reader with
 some idea of the true way in which prophecy
 should be studied. After construct-ing our
 prophetic chart, at least in so far as the general
 outlines are concerned, by means of the visions
 of Daniel, supplemented by those of John, we
 are then in the true position for viewing and
 understanding the isolated prophecies of Isaiah.
 We shall find how much Daniel helps us to
 interpret Isaiah, and again how much Isaiah
 assists us in understanding Daniel. They assist
 mutually in arranging each other. Had all
 prophecies been chronological, our difficulties
 in the way of *interpretation* would have been
 greater than they are. Had all been discursive,
 our difficulties in the way of *arrangement*
 would have been considerably multiplied.

It would be useful to turn to Daniel’s other
 visions; but this would lead us into too large a
 field of exposition. I have given the outline of
 the first vision, and this may be regarded as the
 general calendar, comprehending all the rest.
 The other visions of this prophet, with the
 exception of that of the four beasts, which is
 identical with that of the image, as well as those
 of the Apocalypse, are just parts of this great
 outline on a larger scale. In them certain events
 are introduced separately, yet so as to be
 exactly fitted into this great outline. There is,

however, a remarkable difference between the first and second vision of Daniel, to which it may be well to advert, because in any chronological sketch these two visions must go together; the second being supplementary to the first. The first was delivered to a heathen monarch; and in it we find little reference to the Church of Christ, till the very close: while in the second, the Church of Christ is introduced, and the things concerning it spoken of at length. Its peculiar history, as a little flock oppressed and afflicted, is painted, and the influence of the Gentile empires upon its history. In the first, the kingdoms were presented to Nebuchadnezzar, a worldly monarch, under the form of all that is most prized among men,—the gold, the silver, the brass, and the useful iron. In the second they were shown to Daniel, a prophet and a saint, under the emblem of fierce beasts of prey, to be dreaded, not to be admired; because in this vision the oppression of the Church by these powers was the chief point to which his attention was to be directed. In the former we have the mere prediction of a succession of monarchs who should occupy the earth before the kingdom of the Son of man; but the peculiar features of each, and the brutal character of all, were not declared. These things show us that there is no unmeaning repetition in these two visions, though they run through the same period; and they account also for the trouble of the soul into which the prophet was thrown by the appalling picture brought before his eyes of the suffering saints of the Most High.

The chief object of the second vision seems to be to set forth the oppression of the saints, and their final exaltation to that supremacy in the earth which their adversaries had held so long. The sufferings of the saints are not, however, directly introduced till the time of the fourth beast, when the little horn came up, a king diverse from the former king, “wearing out” the saints, and speaking great words against the Most High. The special end of the vision seems to be, to set forth the warfare between the saints and the little horn.

This power is exhibited as, both by subtlety and might, doing his utmost to oppress and extirpate the saints, and as having power over

them given to him, until the termination of the period there foreshown. Then the destroyer of the Church and the enemy of Israel is consumed by fiery judgment, and utterly destroyed by the coming of the Son of man. After this terrible adversary has been broken and annihilated, the saints enter upon the peaceful possession of their inheritance, and the whole earth has rest. The spoiler is spoiled; the city of confusion is confounded; the day of the Church’s tribulation has passed away, and her triumph has begun. Till that day, however, we look for no Millennium; no day of peace. If these visions be true, oppression is to be the Church’s lot on earth, till the Lord come. It is but the vanity of a fond fancy to count upon triumph, or even tranquility, till He comes, who shall say to the wasting tempest, “Peace, be still!” It is unscriptural to hope till then, to “reform the face of the whole earth (I use the words of John Knox), which never was, nor yet shall be, till the righteous King and Judge appear for the restoration of all things.”

Present times, indeed, are dark; but the better and brighter are beyond. God’s purposes are evolving, and the world’s affairs are ripening to a crisis. Let shadows, then, darken as they may, we can look out from under them with calmness, and anticipate the glories of advancing day. The stone shall smite the image, and grind it to powder. The Man of Sin, the oppressor of the saints, he of the triple crown, shall not long be able to maintain his seat in his fastness of old Rome; and the Church, of which he calls himself the infallible head, though wondrously revived of late from the blow that had brought her to the dust, and though again “prostitute-dressed in the cast-off garments of Paganism,” shall be stripped naked, made desolate, and burnt with fire; for “in her is found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that have been slain upon the earth.”

I do not speak thus as if I believed that Popery is all the Antichrist we are to witness. There is one to arise out of it, more terrible in its strength and cruelty. Yet I can see many prophetic hints of their mysterious relation-ship to each other. The latter is to be the offspring of the former; not a solitary tree shooting up from

a root of its own, side by side with its fellow. It was Pagan Rome that gave birth to Papal Rome; a more monstrous form of evil than its predecessor, yet receiving from her much of her outward form, and rite, and raiment, and seating herself in the same place of power. So out of Papal Rome is to arise Infidel Rome, darker, fiercer, and more Antichristian than she, yet with the same blood in her veins, retaining the same ancestral citadel of royal dominion, along with the principles, the features, the robes of her progenitor.

Such is the triple form of wickedness which the last of the four Gentile empires is to bring forth. There is first the "serpent's root;" then there is the "cockatrice;" and, lastly, there is the "fiery flying-serpent" (Isa. 14:29). The last shall tower above the rest in suddenness of uprising, in potency of evil, in hatred of Christ, and in oppression of the saints: but not the less does he belong to that ancient stock of Belial, the princes of the seed-royal of

hell. He is but a riper and more essential form of evil. "The child is father of the man." Owing and perhaps professing every form of religion, he shall yet be devoid of all. Building altars to every god, he "shall magnify himself above all gods." Acknowledging all creeds, he shall believe none. Covering the spectral nakedness of Atheism with the many-colored vestments of every various priesthood, he shall stand up in the time of the end, the impersonation of all evil from the beginning, Satan's maturest form of wickedness, and truest image of himself, in molding whom he has put forth in all his skill, if so be that he might persuade the whole earth together to recognize as their king one who would rule more entirely as his vice-regent and repre-sentative than any heretofore, and through whom he might receive, what he has all along been laying claim to and striving to compass, the homage and obedience of the world, in defiance of Jehovah and His Anointed Son!