

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

ISRAEL

THIS chapter must needs be of considerable length. The importance of the subject calls for it; for Israel's history, both past and future, occupies no narrow region, either in the purposes of God or in His written Word. Besides, the prophecies concerning Israel are the key to all the rest. True principles of interpretation, in regard to them, will aid us in disentangling and illustrating all prophecy together. False principles as to them will most thoroughly perplex and overcloud the whole Word of God. In addition to these reasons, however, there are others that need not be hidden. A large class of expositors, both in America and in Britain, are setting themselves against the literal application of the prophecies to Israel. Even some who preach the near advent of the Lord, and hold fast "literality," make no scruple to spiritualize all that the prophets have forespoken concerning the children of Abraham according to the flesh. In these circumstances, a minute and somewhat protracted examination of the whole subject, even at risk of a slight apparent repetition, will not, I think, be judged either superfluous or misplaced.

No one maintains that all Scripture is literal, or that all is figurative.¹ It is at once admitted by all that it contains numerous instances of both of these kinds of writing. Hence we see the weakness, as well as unfairness, of a method of arguing which has been practiced by the disputers on both sides. I mean that of charging

each other with the absurdities which would ensue if either of the systems were pressed to an extreme. The argument may sometimes be brought to bear with effect upon the interpretation of particular passages; but it ought to be set aside as a useless and often mischievous element in the discussion of the general question. If the literalist be entitled to say to his opponent, "What absurdities your principles would develop if carried through!" his opponent is, on the other hand, perfectly entitled to point to the incongruities which would ensue from the literal system pressed to an extreme.

All admit that there is much that is literal, and much that is figurative, in Scripture. From this admission, all reasoning on this matter ought to start. Proceeding from this, two great questions meet us: *first*, How are we to ascertain what is literal and what is figurative? *secondly*, How are we to interpret what is ascertained to be figurative? I do not mean to examine and answer these questions minutely; I content myself with a few hints towards their solution.

According to the original formation of language, the figurative may be said to be the basis of the literal, as I have shown in another chapter; but, with language well molded and matured, the opposite may be affirmed. The literal is the common and natural style employed in communicating with each other; the figurative is a departure from that style. This deviation is, of course, not adopted save for special reasons, such as enforcing, illustrating, or even, it may be, in some prophecies, for veiling the subject. Thus it is the literal that is the basis of the figurative,—the point from which we start in estimating the nature and extent of the figure employed; and, conversely, the figurative is interpreted by

¹ With the greatest respect, we must disagree here. William Tyndale explicitly upheld the literal interpretation of *all* Scripture. Refer to J. I. Packer's quotation in his *'Fundamentalism' and the Word of God*, pp. 103-104. Similarly, refer to Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, pp. 89-96.
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tracing it back to the literal, by observing how it rose out of and was grafted upon it. The literal, then, is the rule, and the figurative is the exception; and, of course, before an exception can be admitted, reasons must be given for departing from the rule. Even the Rationalists of Germany, who have no great liking to the literal understanding of Scripture, take this for granted. Ernesti, in his "Institutes," expressly says, "The natural meaning is not to be departed from without evident reason or necessity."² Ammon, his annotator, a more thorough Neologian than himself, remarks, "We are not to quit the natural meaning unless it be frigid, ridiculous, or contradictory."³

In all cases, then, we are bound to adhere to the literal, until we can show *reasons* for departing from it. These reasons ought to be well weighed and found sufficient before we venture to disturb the plain meaning of God's own words. For instance, the Unitarian departs from the literal meaning of those passages which speak of our Lord's incarnation and divinity, because *he cannot understand* how such a sense is reconcilable with other Scripture statements respecting the unity of Godhead. But is that a valid reason for turning those passages into figures? The common sense of a man tells him that this is perverting, not expounding Scripture. If all strong expressions are to be set down as Orientalisms, which may be interpreted as we please, what becomes of inspiration?

But I am told that the literal sense is often so carnal that it must be departed from. Perhaps in some cases it may be so; but every passage must first be brought separately to the test. A literal fulfillment is often just as spiritual as any other; and it is a strange misapprehension of the true scope of Scripture to suppose that because some interpret literally, therefore they do not interpret spiritually. Besides, with the comparative value of the spiritual over the literal, we have in the first instance, nothing to do in

interpreting Scripture. We have simply to ascertain the *real* meaning of the words, whether that meaning be literal or spiritual. Take the prophecies regarding the incarnation of Christ. Before that event took place, there might be a controversy as to whether they were to be literally fulfilled or not. A Jew might have argued with much apparent force against a literal meaning, What! Is God to take upon Himself the form of a man? Is Jehovah to become an infant of days, nay, to be born of a creature, to be a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, to die and be buried, as men die and are buried? Impossible! the very idea is carnal beyond endurance. These prophecies cannot be interpreted in their literal sense; they must have some figurative, some spiritual meaning. So might a Jew have argued before Messiah came; and truly, when we think what it was that he had to believe regarding his Messiah, we could not have wondered had he found much difficulty in receiving such prophecies as literal; our wonder is at the strength of that faith which, in spite of difficulties so vast, could take in the idea, and believe in the reality of that stupendous fact which the literal interpretation of prophecy involved. The fact, the glorious but stupendous fact, made known in the fullness of time, proved not only that the literal was the true sense of these prophecies regarding Messiah's first coming, but also established this truth, that the literal interpretation and fulfillment may be the more truly spiritual of the two. Take, as another illustration of the point in hand, the doctrine of the resurrection. That doctrine appeared to some, in the first ages, such a carnal doctrine, that they denied the literal accomplishment of those Scriptures which speak of it. Of these were Hymenæus and Philetis, mentioned in the Second Epistle to Timothy. They maintained that a literal resurrection was such a carnal thing, that those passages which refer to it must mean something spiritual,—the resurrection of the soul from sin. They "erred concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection was past already" [2:18]. Here, also, the literal was the more spiritual of the two interpretations.

² "Non sine evidenti causa aut necessitate proprietatem deserendam."

³ "A sensu proprio non recedendum est, nisi extat frigidus, ridiculus, aut contradictorius."

We have no objection to the spiritual, provided the literal be found *untenable*; but till it be found so, we shall continue to hold by it. Not that we object to a spiritual application of these predictions: all we ask is, that such a spiritual application be founded upon a literal interpretation. We should spiritualize and apply prophecy just as we should history; that is, we should first interpret it. We should deal with the Book of Isaiah as we should do with the Book of Chronicles. We might admit that there was more of a figure in the former than in the latter, though not so much more as many suppose; but we should still maintain that the language was essentially the same, and that, therefore, the same grammar and lexicon would do for both. The question would turn out to be one as to the difference in degree, not in kind. There are figures in Chronicles as well as in Isaiah. It seems often taken for granted that those who assert the literal interpretation of the blessings promised to Israel, thereby exclude the spiritual. They do not. They assert the literal blessing, because they believe that God has promised it; but they maintain the superiority and necessity of the spiritual as firmly as do the others. They believe that Israel will be converted, and they rejoice in this as the glorious issue towards which the prophets point. But they believe more; they believe not only that they will be converted, but they will be restored to their own land. But does their literal restoration take from them one single spiritual blessing? Or does it prevent the Gentile nations from enjoying one of those innumerable blessings which are given to them for an inheritance?

Every word of prophecy is big with meaning. Hence it must be most carefully and exactly interpreted. To attach a general meaning to a whole chapter, as is frequently done, shows not only grievous irreverence for the Divine Word, but much misconception of the real nature of that language in which it is written. Yet such is often the practice of many expositors of prophecy. They will take up a chapter of Isaiah, and tell you that it refers to the future glory of the Christian Church; and that is the one idea

which they gather from a whole chapter, or sometimes from a series of chapters. Their system does not admit of interpreting verse by verse and clause by clause, and affixing an exact and definite sense to each. Bring them to this test, and their system gives way. It looks fair and plausible enough, so long as they can persuade you that the whole chapter is one scene, out of which it is merely designed that one grand idea should be extracted; but bring it to the best of minute and precise interpretation, and its nakedness is at once discovered. Many prophecies become in this way a mere waste of words. What might be expressed in one sentence, is beaten out over a whole chapter; nay, sometimes over a whole book.⁴

These expositors think that there is nothing in prophecy, except that Jew and Gentile are all to be gathered in, and made one in Christ. Prophet after prophet is raised up, vision after vision is given, and yet nothing is declared but this one idea! Every chapter almost of Isaiah foretells something about the future glory of the world; and every chapter presents it to us in some new aspect, opening up new scenes, and pointing out new objects; but, according to the scheme of some, every chapter sets forth the same idea, reiterates the same objects, and depicts the same scenes. Is not this handling the Word of God deceitfully? If these expositors oppose literal interpretation, surely they cannot object to a *minute* one. Though insisting on a spiritual interpretation, they will surely allow us to insist on a *definite* understanding of each clause, however spiritual they might be. Their spirituality is surely not inconsistent with definiteness and precision. I should like to see a regular paraphrase upon the Prophets,

⁴ "The latter chapters of Ezekiel, describing the erection of a certain temple, are involved in so much obscurity, that it seems difficult to arrive at any determinate conclusion respecting the import of this mysterious prophecy. *It is certain that the attempt to spiritualize it produces little besides perplexity and confusion; nor have we any example in Scripture of an allegory so perfectly dark and enigmatic, as it must be confessed to be, on that supposition.*"—Robert Hall, *Works*, vol. iv. p. 405.

constructed upon their system, and going over each chapter, verse and clause. I suspect there would be found some difficulty; and that just because of the loose ideas which are entertained with regard to the language of Scripture, and especially to the language of prophecy.

The patriarchs and prophets, and members of the Jewish Church, understood spiritual things much about as well as we do. I do not speak about the clearness of their light; I simply speak of their apprehending religious worship as a spiritual thing, and religious worship as spiritual men, just as we do. They could speak of spiritual community as we would do, and find no lack of words; and we know that they often did so. The prophets often did so. The apostles did so. They spoke of the Church of God in plain and natural language—language evidently familiar to their hearts. When James wrote to “the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad” [Jas. 1:1], he just meant the twelve tribes of Israel, and not some indefinite community. He took it for granted, that though he wrote after the calling of the Gentiles, words had the same meaning as they had before, and therefore he simply addressed his epistle to the twelve tribes. But if, as some seem to hold, Scripture language has undergone a spiritual transmutation since the calling of the Gentiles, James cannot mean his fellow-countrymen of Israel, but some spiritual community.

Both prophets and apostles could express spiritual things in natural and precise language. They have done so in many instances where no figure is to be seen. If this be the case, we come to a very different conclusion from some with regard to their design in using the language of Jewish history in their predictions. In many cases, perhaps in most, they employ it just because the events spoken of are literally to be accomplished, and therefore no other language could have been used. But, further, they use it in those cases, and in others also where there may be more of figure in it, because that language, founded as it was upon events and rites well known to all, brought out, with a fullness and exactness of minute description, those individual scenes which they predicted, such as no other language could have

expressed. They labored for words to express the vast ideas with which they were filled, and to depict the glowing scenes which were opened to their gaze; for words of sufficient power and vastness to set forth those ideas and those scenes, yet, at the same time, of such precision and minuteness, that every line and stroke of the picture might convey a definite idea. No language but that constructed in the way we have referred to (constructed by the Holy Spirit out of Jewish history and rites) could have accomplished this design, and attained these two objects at once. The language of prophecy is such, that to generalize it is to deprive it of its real distinctive character, to empty it of its richness, and to rob it of its power. It has a fullness and a depth which are altogether lost when it is interpreted in any general way. Each word calls up a picture, and therefore demands the closest scrutiny.

So far, then, from conceding the opinion that the prophets used language of the peculiarly Jewish, or, as we might call it, Mosaic cast, because they had no other by which to convey their representations of the future glory of the Church, we maintain just the opposite. We maintain that they could have expressed those general ideas which are supposed to engross their pages, in common language, and that in several places they have done so. The reason for which they used their peculiar style was, because it was the fullest, richest, and most exact that could be adopted; nay because it was especially constructed by God to express that vast variety of ideas which prophecy unfolds, with a correctness, and, at the same time, with a power, of which common language did not admit. Its difficulty of interpretation lies in its being so full and so minute; so that every clause and every word require to be studied and analyzed, and compared with the events in history to which they allude, and on which their true and exact interpretation so much depends.

We cannot admit that the man who generalizes, or as he may call it, spiritualizes the prophets, has any better right to do so to them than to the historians of the past. They who spiritualize the history of the Fall and such Old Testament narratives, do it on the same

principles as the spiritualizers of prophecy. Nor do we see how one who turns prophecy into a figure, can stop till he has turned history into the same.

When it is declared regarding Israel, "The Lord thy God will turn thy captivity, and gather thee from all the nations whither the Lord thy God hath scattered thee" [Deut. 30:3]; what are we to infer from the juxtaposition of the scattering and the gathering? That they are both of the same kind. Both were future events at the time this prophecy of Moses was given; both, therefore, would be understood in the same way at the time. The one of these has now become a matter of history. It has, by the event, been proved to be a literal prophecy of the dispersion of Israel. Are not, then, the presumptions very strong in favor of the other being of the same kind? If, before either was fulfilled, the presumption was that both were literal, how much stronger now, when history has shown one of them to be really so! And when we are told by some that these prophecies are not to be literally fulfilled, may we not reply, that the very same reasons which prove the future history of the Jews to be spiritual, will prove their past history to be the same? If prophecy, where it speaks of their gathering, means merely their con-version, then, of course, history, when it declares their dispersion, means merely that they were left unconverted; for it is quite evident, that the future gathering of Israel, whatever that may be, is a gathering *from the very dispersion* which has taken place. The gathering must of necessity correspond to the scattering, else the language of prophecy is confusion and uncertainty. If the gathering be only spiritual, the dispersion must have been so too. And, therefore, for anything that history tells us, the Jews may be still in their own land, and not driven out among the nations, for the words "scattering," &c., were mere figures of the historian, to denote their unconverted state!

But this leads us to consider another point which here suggests itself, namely, whether the literal accomplishment of the prophecies in regard to the literal Israel be consistent with the gospel. It is said, "All are one in Christ Jesus,

therefore there can be no national distinction of the Jews, no national restoration, no national pre-eminence." I am unable to comprehend the ground or force of this reasoning. I cannot discern the very shadow of inconsistency between the two things; nor can I understand how the national distinctiveness, or even national pre-eminence of the Jews, should prevent their being one in Christ Jesus with their Gentile brethren.

Some have surely a strange notion of what is meant by being "one in Christ," when they make their spiritual oneness depend upon the uniformity of external circumstances. What a low idea of Christian oneness! They charge us with carnal views because we insist upon the future distinctiveness of the Jewish nation; but it appears that the charge of carnality belongs to them, not to us! We believe in the literal accomplishment of the prophecies regarding the Jews, in which there appear to be many promises of temporal blessings as well as spiritual; but we lay no further stress upon these than the Word of God lays; we admit spiritual blessings to be the highest and noblest. Our opponents, however, lay such stress upon external circumstances, as to insist, that if these exist the oneness in Christ is gone. We had always understood Scripture as telling us, not that there were no national distinctions, but that, *in spite of these*, there was a oneness which bound together all believers; a oneness so spiritual, so divine, so unearthly, to unapproachable, as not to be in the very least affected by temporal distinctions of time, or place, or rank.

The apostle's statement is this; "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus," In this statement, so far from denying the distinctions here specified, his argument takes for granted that they all exist; and the greater the distinction, the stronger does his statement appear. He does not mean to say that such differences are to cease under Christianity; he plainly assumes that they do, nay, that some of them *must* always exist. In point of fact, we know that they have not

ceased. The Jew has still been recognized by the same national name after he has embraced the gospel, and so has the Greek; the slave has still remained a slave; the free still free; the distinction between male and female is still the same. The apostle's object was to show that, let these distinctions be what they may, there is common ground on which, notwithstanding these, all stand united. He maintains that these differences, even when magnified to the uttermost, cannot interfere with the perfect, the absolute, the universal freeness of the gospel, nor mar the glorious unity into which all are brought who have put on Christ. It is only when viewed in this way that we see the bearing of such a statement upon the apostle's argument in the passage cited. He does not mean to say that the Jew was no longer a Jew when he embraced the gospel, the Greek no longer a Greek, the slave no longer a slave, the free no longer free, the man and woman no longer distinguished from each other, but simply that these distinctions could not interfere, as many supposed, with the freeness and universality of the gospel.

It is not, then, the man who maintains the perpetuity of these distinctions that contradicts the spirit of the gospel, but the man who lays such stress upon them as to say that, if they still subsist, all men cannot be one in Christ. We therefore charge those who argue in the above manner with maintaining a principle inconsistent with the gospel. It is *they*, not *we*, who are chargeable with such error. We throw back the charge, which has so often been made against us, upon those who have so inconsistently endeavored to fasten upon others the very errors upon which they were acting themselves. Their ideas of the gospel must be restrictive and low indeed, who can assert that the highest earthly distinctions, the mightiest national preeminence, could in the least interfere with the spiritual privileges which that gospel brings to all who by faith receive it. Carry out their inference from the above passage one step further, and in what absurdity are they landed! If the freeness of the gospel be inconsistent with national distinctions, it must be as inconsistent with distinctions of ranks and

sexes, which are classed under this same head by the apostle.

In this argument, however, two things are generally confounded, which yet are distinct from each other—the national distinctness and national preeminence of the Jews. I believe in both, because I find that both are predicted. But still they are not inseparable. They are in themselves quite different; and therefore, even though some of the arguments of our opponents were much stronger than they are against the latter, the former might be still untouched. Even though the principle combated above, regarding the oneness which the gospel brings, did tell against Israel's preeminence, it would be a thing of some difficulty to make it tall against Israel's national distinctiveness.

What, then, we ask of our opponents, is this; to tell us definitely and precisely *how* the literal fulfillment of the prophecies respecting Israel is inconsistent with the nature and spirit of the gospel. It is easy to *assert* this, but to show *how* and *why* is a different thing. Let them examine into the real state of the question, and then they will perhaps find that it was some old prejudice that has hitherto kept them at a distance from the true point at issue, which made them think it quite unnecessary for them more minutely to investigate a matter which, from childhood it may be, has always appeared too plain to be denied, or even doubted. If the literal fulfillment could be plainly and unquestionably proved to be inconsistent with the gospel, then we should be staggered. We should then be led to seek some other interpretation; we should then be *forced* from the literal exposition. But till we are in some such way *compelled* to abandon the plain meaning of the word, we shall continue to hold it fast.

Nor shall we give it up for any mere probable inferences. By none of the plausible suggestions of reason, or the natural improbabilities that lie in our way, or our own inability to trace distinctly its practical bearings, by none of these things shall we be persuaded to abandon the natural and unsophisticated interpretation of God's Word. We hold every jot and tittle sacred; we must take it as we find it; we must interpret it simply and naturally;

nor can we consent to adopt that system which, instead of taking the living water with which every verse overflows, would distil, perchance, one drop from a whole chapter; as if that were all. It matters not though that drop be pure as the light, and brilliant as the rainbow, refreshing to the taste, and sparkling with manifold luster; God meant us not to draw it in that way, and from that place, and therefore we must lay it aside in the meantime, and seek it afterwards at another source. It is not enough to say that such an idea is *true*; we must further know if it be the very truth for the declaration of which the Spirit indicted that particular passage. Men may say, "Is not a spiritual more excellent than a literal meaning?" Let it be so; still that is not the question; otherwise we might overturn all history by elevating it from a literal to a spiritual sense. The question simply is, "What has God said?" not, "Which is, in our esteem, the more dignified meaning?" Men may also say, as they have often said, "You literalists are always searching into things secret and hidden; your principles lead you to this; you ought not to study things not revealed." Of course, common sense teaches us that we cannot do what is impossible. If a moral necessity will not prevent us from attempting what is unlawful or irreverent, a physical necessity will surely prevent us from doing what is impracticable. This is a simple truism. But to study Scripture is to study what is revealed, not what is secret. And who is the man that will say that there is anything of irreverence or presumption in searching into every letter of Scripture? Where is the Christian that *dare do otherwise*? To know more of God, and more of the mind of God, is the saint's daily endeavor. Every verse of Scripture reveals more of His mind, and gives us a nearer and fuller insight into His vast designs. In passing from verse to verse, we seem as if passing from chamber to chamber of the King's palace. Scene after scene presents itself, wonder after wonder opens up on the right hand and on the left, all new and all divine; all in different ways fashioned, and set in order for disclosing to us "the manifold wisdom of God."

Having endeavored to answer the chief objections brought against the literal interpretation of the prophecies, I have now to consider the evidence of that literal view. Before stating this, however, I have three remarks to make.

1st. That the burden of proof lies properly on those who depart from the natural meaning of the words. We hold that, without a decided reason, no man is at liberty to do so. To take for granted that the spiritual is the true meaning in any part of it, is to confound all language and interpretation. The opposite proceeding is the only legitimate one. We must assume that the literal is the sole and true meaning, till we can find some reason for departing from it. *It is upon the validity of these reasons that every spiritual interpretation must stand or fall.*

2nd. We remark that, in so far as prophecy has been already fulfilled, that fulfillment has been a literal one. Take the predictions regarding the Messiah. His being born of the house of David; of a virgin; at Bethlehem; being carried down to and brought up out of Egypt; His healing diseases; His entering Jerusalem on an ass; His being betrayed by one of His disciples; His being left by all His familiar friends; His being smitten, buffeted, spit upon; His side being pierced; His bones unbroken; His raiment divided by lot; His receiving vinegar; His being crucified between two thieves; His being buried by a rich man; His lying three days in the tomb; His rising on the third day; His ascending up on high, and sitting at the right hand of God; these, and many others, have all been fulfilled to the very letter; far more literally than we could have ever conceived. And are not these fulfillments strong arguments in favor of the literality of all that yet remain behind? Nay, do they not furnish us with a distinct, unambiguous, and inspired canon of interpretation? Take, again, the prophecies which concern the heathen nations; Babylon, Nineveh, Tyre, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Egypt. Have not all these been literally fulfilled? Or, *lastly*, take the predictions regarding Israel. Have not all been literally verified? Captivity, dispersion, exile, misery, contempt, and oppression, have been their history to this very

hour. And was there one particular of all their wondrous history which prophecy did not foretell? Up to this hour all has been literal fulfillment in their case. And shall the curse pronounced on them be fulfilled to the very letter, but not the blessing?

But, 3rd. We would remark upon the ambiguity with which *spiritual* expositors interpret the names Israel, Judah, and such like. These words may have three meanings. They *may* mean the literal Israel, or they may mean the visible Church, or they may mean the real spiritual children of Abraham. Now, what we remark is, that many expositors mix up these three meanings, so that sometimes one of these is said to be the true one and sometimes the other, according as it suits their views. They lay down no rule for fixing the signification of these words, so as to determine exactly when they mean one thing and when they mean another. Prophecy, under such a system, is mere confusion and uncertainty. To say, as is often done, that, when the predictions refer to the Christian Church, they must be spiritually interpreted, is such a begging of the question, that we wonder how any one could seriously advance such a statement; for the very point in dispute is, whether they do refer to the Christian Church.

How are we to rid ourselves of the inextricable confusion in which we are involved by not knowing what *Israel* really means? When we quote some strong passage of the prophets in proof of the restoration of literal Israel, we are met with two explanations. At one time we are told that such a passage does not refer to the restoration, but to the *conversion* of the Jews; and, again, at another time we are told that these prophecies do not allude to the Jews at all, but to the Christian Church. In this manner, Scripture is recklessly tossed about from one interpretation to another, till the infidel scoffs at men pretending to confute him from prophecy, who yet do not themselves know whether the prediction refers to Jew or Gentile. Some, however, seem inclined to fix the meaning of most passages to the Christian Church; not to the merely visible Church, but to the really spiritual Israel. But here we do feel

at a stand. These prophecies speak of the conversion of those called Israel, that is, of the conversion of those who are already converted! They were entitled to the name of Israel because they were believers, or converted men; and yet of these it is foretold that they shall be converted in goodly numbers in the latter days. What a maze!

The expression, "the throne of David," often occurs in prophecy; and it is difficult to understand exactly what the spiritualists make of it. According to them, as far as we can see, David's throne might mean any throne, David's kingdom, any kingdom; or rather it must mean every throne and every kingdom. But surely David's throne was not in heaven. His kingdom was not in heaven. His throne was not in the hearts of men. His reign was not a mere reign of principles. We are not here contending for a literal and visible occupation of David's throne by David in Jerusalem; all we are now maintaining is, that whatever it means, it must at least mean, *the peculiar sovereignty of Messiah over the literal Israel*. It appears to us, that Christ's being to receive the throne of His father David, must refer to the peculiar dominion which He is to exercise over the tribes and land over which David ruled.

That "the throne of David," and such like expressions, have the literal meaning we have stated, is, we think, evident from many passages of the Old and the New Testament Scriptures. I might ask for evidence that it means a throne in men's hearts, and leave the matter there. But I would at the same time point out at least one passage which appears to me very strongly in favor of the literal view, and that is, the answer of our Lord to His disciples when they questioned Him regarding the kingdom, as it is recorded in the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. They asked, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" [v. 6]. Now, we know well what they meant by "the kingdom," and by its restoration to Israel. They understood restoration to that dominion and pre-eminence which Israel had enjoyed in other days, according to God's promises to Abraham. Not that they excluded spiritual blessings. There is no reason for supposing that they ever

did so, amid the many carnal ideas which they entertained; but they believed that, in addition to these, external prosperity and deliverance were to be vouchsafed. Holding these opinions regarding the kingdom, they put the question above quoted to their Master. And what was His reply? Did He show them the impropriety and carnality of their views? Did He tell them that their interpretations of restored supremacy to Israel were vain and worldly? No; He took for granted that their expectations were correct, and merely cautioned them against searching too eagerly and impatiently into the times and seasons. He did not put a different meaning on the words *kingdom* and *Israel* from what they did; He only reminded them that the Father kept the times in His own hand. He thus admitted that the kingdom was to be *restored* to Israel; and His declaration is no answer to His disciples' question, unless it mean this. Nay, it was fitted to mislead them, if their ideas of the restoration of the kingdom were wrong.⁵

It is of great moment to remember for what end the prophets wrote, and what were the circumstances of Israel at that time. Almost all their burdens begin with denouncing Israel's sin, and proclaiming Israel's judgment. The nation itself, the people, the land, the cities, the mountains, the priests, and, above all, *the city, the mountain, the temple*, are the objects against which God's indigo-nation is announced. These scenes of apostasy and judgment furnish the gloomy foreground to almost every

prophetic picture. Bright as the visions which open up to us of future blessedness in reserve for this wretched earth, yet almost all of these take their rise in some picture of judgment. Take that scene of coming gladness described in the conclusion of the thirty-third chapter of Isaiah. It is, indeed, one well fitted to comfort and confirm the drooping spirit; a scene of most majestic tranquility, of rich and resplendent loveliness. "Look upon Zion, the city of our solemnities! Thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation, a tabernacle that shall not be taken down" [v. 20]. But how does this fair picture of future glory commence? With lamentation, and mourning, and woe. "The earth mourneth and languisheth; Lebanon is ashamed and hewn down; Sharon is like a wilderness; Bashan and Carmel shake off their fruits" [v. 9]. The prophet stands upon some high eminence, and before him lies the land of Israel. At his feet, in the dark foreground, the desolations are spread out, and he paints them with every image of terror. The land lies desolate, languishing like some uprooted flower; and from every highway the way-faring man has gone, till all is solitude. Lebanon has been stripped of its towering grandeur, and bows the head in shame. Its cedars have been torn from its sides, and it stands in dishonored nakedness. Sharon has lost its flowery beauty, and its fields of roses have become a wilderness. The foliage of Bashan has faded, and the excellency of Carmel has departed. Such is the foreground. After this has been fully described, then, but not till then, does the vision open out in brightness. The prophet's eye passes from the scene immediately beneath his view, and turns to one of fairer aspect. He sees the land restored, the city rebuilt, Jerusalem a quiet habitation, the glorious Lord in the midst of her, her own Messiah, her own anointed King; peace, joy, and righteousness abounding. Thus the vision terminates. Such are the two parts of almost every prophetic sketch.

We have, however, an infallible guide in pursuing our way through Old Testament Scripture. The New Testament is the inspired interpreter of the Old; and when we find the

⁵ "Christ did never absolutely deny His having such a visible glorious kingdom upon earth, as that which His disciples looked for; *only He corrected their error as to the time of this kingdom's appearing.* Christ did not say to them that there would never be any such restoration of the kingdom to Israel as their thoughts were running upon; only He telleth them that the times and seasons were not for them to know; thereby acknowledging that such a kingdom should indeed be, as they did, from the holy prophets, expect. Herein was their error; not in expecting a glorious appearance of the Kingdom of God, but in that they made account that this would be immediately."—*The Mystery of Israel's Salvation*, by INCREASE MATHER, 1669, p. 130.

prophets cited by Christ and His apostles, we are not only sure that their interpretations are true, but we are furnished with a rule for understanding, a key for opening up the whole volume of prophecy. I need not refer in detail to these New Testament quotations; they are all *literal*, in the strictest sense of the word; and it has been shown that there are at least one hundred and nine instances of the literal interpretation in the history of Christ. In these there are no Oriental figures; all is simple. In truth, there is no figure at all, save when it is employed for the sake of definiteness and distinctness. There is no vagueness or ambiguity; all is precision and perspicuity. There may be some which seem less literal; but these are very few, and regarding their meaning there is difference of opinion. In the judgment of many able expositors, even these ought to be literally understood. Let me cite two instances. In his application of the prophecy of Haggai (Heb. 12:26-27), the apostle has been supposed by many to sanction the idea of spiritual fulfillment. He is supposed to assert that that prediction was accomplished in the dissolution of the Jewish polity. But is it not obvious that he is speaking of something still future, and referring to a real and literal shaking of all things; a shaking as literal, though much more terrible and extensive than that which convulsed Mount Sinai, and made all Israel quake? Again, in the Epistle to the Galatians (6:16), the expression "the Israel of God" has been generally interpreted as meaning the spiritual Israel, and as therefore giving countenance to the spiritualizing process by which the Old Testament predictions regarding Israel are robbed of all their peculiar and appropriate meaning. Now here, again, I should be inclined to suggest that the apostle may really be speaking of the literal Israel; and as through out the whole epistle he has been contrasting and comparing the circumcision and uncircumcision, the Jew and the Gentile, so here he first prays for a blessing on the believing Gentiles, and then on the believing Jews. For these two interpretations we are not at present much concerned to contend; I would not lay much stress upon any particular view of

them. From them no rule can be drawn. For that we must go to the unambiguous passages, especially as these are far more numerous.

Regarding these undisputed passages, we remark that they are all instances of literal fulfillments. The obvious conclusion, then, to which we come is, that *literal fulfillment is the New Testament rule*. That there are not exceptions from this, we will not assert; there may be such, but the prevailing principle of exposition acted upon throughout the New Testament is as we have stated above. Can we be wrong in maintaining that, since Christ and His apostles quoted literally, and interpreted literally, *we* ought also to do the same? This is certainly our *rule*? The utmost that can be deduced from the ambiguous passages already referred to is, that since we see that some quotations are applied in a spiritual way, there *may be* others, perhaps, not quoted which require to be interpreted in the same way. There *may* thus be exceptions to this general practice of New Testament writers, and consequently the rule might be said not to be universal and invariable; yet still the exceptions are so few and peculiar, that to build upon them in opposition to the general law of exposition would be most unreasonable and dangerous.

What *rule*, then, we ask, are we entitled to draw from these exceptions? Simply this, that, seeing some quotations are not literally interpreted in the New Testament, others also *may admit* of a spiritual construction; this is all the length to which, upon such data, we are entitled to go. But even this we are not to take advantage of, nor positively to found upon, unless for particular reasons; for the general principle must be maintained, unless there are special grounds for departing from it. It is only when compelled to abandon the general rule as untenable in any particular case, that we are at liberty to resort to the exception. We ought, however, to be sure that the reasons for which we are forced to give up the general principle are solid and scriptural, before taking such a step. It often happens that the literal construction of a passage stands in the way of a particular theory; but that surely is a reason which ought to be cautiously acted on,

inasmuch as, instead of attempting to reconcile our theory with Scripture, we may be seeking to reconcile Scripture with our theory. We are always safe when seeking to be upon the side of Scripture, but we are not always so safe in seeking to have Scripture upon our side. General reasonings, then, ought to be very slowly admitted as grounds for classing a particular passage among the exceptions, instead of placing it (as *prima facie* evidence would lead us to do) as an illustration of the rule itself. In other words, Our Lord and His apostles having, in so many instances, quoted literally from the Old Testament, we ought to do the same, unless special reasons forbid; among which reasons our own theories, or inferences, or systems, or conjectures, ought to be very cautiously adduced, if allowed at all.

The names Israel, Zion, Jerusalem, &c., are so commonly used among us to denote the Church of Christ, that we seldom think of asking our scriptural authority for this appropriation. Custom has naturalized the expression, so that we think it strange to ask how such expressions came to be thus spiritualized. We take it for granted that Scripture as often employs the terms in this way as we do. But do we really find this to be the case? Do we find any such countenance given to this, either in the gospels or the epistles? No; we find the names used in the same plain and natural sense; and no intimation that, in interpreting the prophets, Jew and Gentile, Israel and the Church, were to be used as convertible terms. No change of phraseology took place under the new dispensation, at least in so far as the Divine record enables us to judge. Israel still continued to be used in the same sense in which it had been employed from the days of Moses, for the nation or Church of the Jews, the descendants of Abraham; and so also we may affirm of the similar names used by the prophets for that nation. In looking over the Concordance of proper names in Scripture given by Cruden, we are surprised to find how fully this remark is born out by the fact,—even more fully and extensively than we had anticipated. There are really only two or three

places in the whole New Testament where such names are used in what may be called a spiritual, or figurative sense. These are such as that in Hebrews 12:22, “Ye are come unto Mount Zion,” and the two passages in the Revelation, which speak of the Lamb and His company standing upon Mount Zion [Rev. 5:6?; 14:1]; and even these two last can scarcely be said to be *spiritual*, inasmuch as, although the vision be symbolical, yet each part of it is taken from a literal scene, one object in which is the literal Mount Zion, which was in this way set before the apostle in vision.

In the New Testament, *Jerusalem* occurs nearly eighty times, and all of them unquestionably literal, save where the opposite is expressly pointed out by the epithets *heavenly*, or *new*, or *holy*.⁶ *Jew* occurs above an hundred times, and only four are even ambiguous, such as Romans 2:28. *Israel* and *Israelite* occur above forty times, and all literal. *Judah* and *Judea* above twenty times, and all literal. It would appear, then, that the New Testament affixes the same meaning to these names as the Old did. It *preserves*, instead of changing the former meanings of these familiar terms. It does not, indeed, preclude us from using them in a spiritual sense; but it plainly shows that such is not their natural and scriptural meaning.

If, then, the New Testament be the key of Old Testament prophecy, we can be at no loss to see at least the general principles upon which

⁶ The same remark will apply to Galatians 4:26. There are difficulties connected with this passage; but in whatever way these are solved, still the words “Jerusalem which is above” cannot mean the Christian Church. The epithet “above,” and the whole scope of the apostle’s argument, forbid this. The apostle’s object was to prove that believers in Christ (or the Christian Church) are *free*. He does this by showing that they (or this Church) are the offspring of a Jerusalem that is free. Would it not be absurd, then, to say, “believers are free because the Christian Church is free,” when the very thing to be proved was, whether the Christian Church was free; which the apostle does by proving her connection with a “Jerusalem above,” which all acknowledged to be free?

the latter is to be expounded. There is no New Testament authority for spiritualizing the name of Israel, Judah, Jerusalem, Zion. Our Lord and His apostles, in quoting passages in which these names occurred, took them in their obvious and long-established meaning. If they had not, how could the gainsayer or the Jew have been convinced of unbelief, or rejection of the truth which the prophets had spoken, when the truth of that charge depended altogether upon the skill with which they could spiritualize the sayings of prophecy? Or, how can we at this day refute either the Infidel or the Jew, if names and words do not really mean what they seem to stand for? The Apostle Paul convinced the Jews in his day, by distinct references to the words which the prophets had spoken regarding Israel. He applied to Israel what had been predicted regarding Israel, and thus he "mightily convinced" them. And to this day how can we do otherwise than follow his example? How could a Jew be convinced in any other way? Nay, how could you get a Jew to give you even a patient hearing? You insist upon his believing that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah promised to the fathers, because everything spoken in the law and the prophets concerning Him has been *literally* fulfilled; you dwell upon this point,—the exact and literal fulfillment of all the predictions regarding Him,—and here you stand on ground altogether impregnable. But no sooner do you leave this one point, than you throw your literality into the air; you deny that anything else is literal; and thus you dig from beneath you the ground upon which you might have stood triumphantly both against Jew and Infidel.

With such clear inconsistency, how can you expect a Jew to appreciate your arguments? Nay, how can you wonder if he should question your sincerity? You gather together the passages in which Moses and the prophets have predicted Israel's desolation; you take passage after passage, clause after clause, word after word, and show how fully all that has been spoken has been fulfilled; you point to the ruin of their city, the desolation of their fields, their expulsion from their land and dispersion among

all nations; to the misery, the shame, the degradation under which they have groaned in every age since Jerusalem became a heap. You point to these, and ask a stout-hearted Jew, "Can you remain in your unbelief and rebellion with prophecies so explicit condemning you to the face?" Resistless argument! Were it not that the arguer refutes himself by his own inconsistency. For the Jew, unable, perhaps, to meet directly such conclusive passages, slides away to others which speak in different strains. He points to those declarations which declare that, as Israel has been driven out from his land, so to that very land shall Israel return; that as their city has been laid in ruins and trodden down of the Gentiles, so shall Jerusalem be "rebuilt upon her own heaps," and arise in glory from the dust; that as their land has become a wilderness covered with briars and thorns, Lebanon being hewn down, Sharon languishing, and Carmel shaking off her fruits, so the wilderness and solitary place shall yet be glad, and the desert rejoice and blossom as the rose. He points to these, and comforts himself in the hope that his days of splendor shall return. How amazed is he when told by his Christian opponent that all these are figures; that his return to his own land means only his conversion to Christianity; that the rebuilding of Jerusalem means only the enlarging of the Church of Christ. How bewildered he looks when the very man who had been pleading so eloquently for the full and exact accomplishment of all the curses against Israel, showing so clearly that every clause and word has been fulfilled, not one jot or tittle being abated, now complacently tells him that, though the curses are all literal, yet the blessings are only figurative! Israel has been literally expelled from Canaan; but he is to be only figuratively restored! He has been literally scattered among the nations; but he is only to be figuratively gathered! And all this gravely asserted upon New Testament principles, in the name of Christ and His apostles! What can a Jew think of Christianity after this?

Up to this hour, then, everything respecting Israel has been literally accomplished. Nothing in what has hitherto occurred in their strange

history gives the slightest countenance to the figurative interpretations for which some so strenuously contend. Why is Israel still an exile, an outcast, a wanderer, if there be no literal curse? Why is Jerusalem laid in heaps, and Mount Zion ploughed as a field (Jer. 26:18)? Why is the crown of Samaria broken, its ruins rolled down into the valley, and its vines all withered from the mountain side (Jer. 31:5; Mic. 1:6)? Why is Lebanon hewn down, the oaks of Bashan withered, the roses of Sharon gone? Why do the fields of Heshbon languish? Why is the vine of Sibmah uprooted, the summer fruits of Elealeh faded, and why is Carmel bare? Why is baldness come upon Gaza, and why is Ashkelon cut off? Why is Ammon a couching-place for flocks, and the palaces of Bozrah swept away? Why is Moab fled, Idumea become a wilderness, and Mount Seir laid desolate? Why is all this, if there be no *literal* curse? And why, if there has been such a literal curse, is the literal blessing to be denied?

It is foolish to answer, as many do, "The spiritual blessing is far richer; why contend about blessings of meaner value?" Why? Because we believe that God has revealed them; because we believe that as God has been dishonored by Israel's being an outcast from the land of promise, so He will be honored by their peaceful settlement again; because as we know He was glorified in leading up Israel, His first-born, out of Egypt, from the tyranny of Pharaoh, through the wilderness into Canaan, so we believe He designs to glorify Himself by a second exodus, and a second establishment in the land given to Abraham and his seed; because as He magnified His name and power in the sight of the heathen by bringing His people out from Babylon after seventy years' captivity, so we believe He will magnify that name again by leading them out of Babylon the Great, and planting them in their ancient possessions to inherit them forever; never to be disturbed by the enemy; never to hear the voice of war again. For it is written, "I will make thee an eternal excellency, the joy of many generations; thy people shall be all righteous, they shall inherit the land forever" [Isa. 60:15, 21].

This people, thus restored, are to be called by a new name, *Hephzibah*, and the land also by a new name, *Beulah*; their King is to be the Prince of Peace, and the name of their city from thenceforth is to be *Jehovah-Shammah*, "The Lord is there" (Ezek. 48:35).

But why, it is still asked, thus contend for literal blessings, seeing there are spiritual blessings richer far? I answer, Why has God inflicted a literal curse? Was not a spiritual curse more terrible by far? Was it not enough that their eyes were blinded, and their hearts hardened, and the knowledge of the true Messiah hidden from them, so that they were left to go on in misery and darkness without God, and without a hope? Was not this enough, without being sent forth as wanderers among the nations, mingling with all, yet separated from all? Could the infliction of the temporal curse add anything to their spiritual banishment from God? If, in their future history, the spiritual blessing be enough, why, in their past history, should not the spiritual curse suffice? Or, if God, by their history, has made it plain to all that He meant the temporal as well as the spiritual, why should man presume to be wiser than God, and say that in the time to come, one of these is enough? I am not contending for temporal blessings alone. I admit that these without the other world would be poor indeed. Even Eden would have been a wilderness without the presence of God; but Eden was a blessed place when God was there. So with Israel. We contend as much as any one for the future amount of spiritual blessings to Israel; we would not abate one jot of these; we know that without the outpouring of the Spirit upon them, even Jerusalem, rebuilt by God, and their land a second Paradise, would still be a scene of misery, a region of darkness. But whilst we believe that Israel shall receive to the full all the spiritual blessings which the most strenuous spiritualist can imagine, we also believe that all manner of temporal blessings are awaiting them too, according to the promise of God. These two things are surely not incompatible. The one does not exclude or neutralize the other. Israel's being brought from the ends of the earth, and

planted in his own land again, will be no hindrance to his enjoying to the full all the spiritual blessings which God has still in reserve for him. And if God has been pleased in His Word to speak of gathering them from all nations, planting them in their own land, rebuilding their cities, &c., can we, or ought we, to affirm that these expressions mean nothing else but their conversion to Christ? Is there one who will attempt to prove, that such predictions *cannot* mean temporal restoration, and that they must mean spiritual restoration? Why are men so *anxious* to deny the literal sense? Why are they so eagerly solicitous to prove it all a figure? Why have they such a singular dislike to give to such predictions their natural and common-sense meaning? Why are they so *afraid* of literality? We know of no instance in which the literal sense has injured the Church, or introduced heresy; but from the days of Origen down-wards, to the era of modern Neology, all manner of evil has attended the departure from the literal sense of the Scripture.

In addition to these general principles on which I contend for the literal interpretation of the prophecies regarding Israel, let me very briefly state one or two more.

I. In those passages where Jew and Gentile are spoken together, and either compared or contrasted, we are sure that the prophecy regards the literal Israel. If not, then what does the term *Gentile* mean? If in such passages Israel means the Christian Church, then the most obvious absurdities and incongruities would ensue. Many a prophecy would in this way be stripped, not merely of its peculiar meaning, but of all meaning together. The different circumstances of Jew and Gentile; the contrast between them; the relation the one bears to the other; the influence one is to exert upon the other, are very frequently alluded to and dwelt upon in prophecy: and keeping these things in view, the passages are plain, their connection clear, their interpretation natural. Deny these; make Zion or Israel to mean the Church of Christ, and whole chapters are either one mass of confusion, or from beginning to

end a monotonous repetition of one single idea (Isa. 49:22; 60:3; 62:2).

II. In those prophecies which preserve the well-known distinction between Judah and Israel, or Judah and Ephraim, we must interpret Israel, Zion, &c., literally of the Jewish nation, or church, or land, or city; otherwise we introduce most unmeaning names, and inappropriate figures. As, for instance, Zechariah 9:13, "When I have bent Judah for me, filled the bow with Ephraim, and raised up thy sons, O Zion, against thy sons, O Greece" &c. See also Isaiah 11:12-13; Jeremiah 30:3.

III. When the unfulfilled prophecy is the carrying on or conclusion of one chain, the first part of which has been literally fulfilled, or is literally fulfilling before our eyes. If in the first part of a prophecy Israel just means Israel, of course in the latter part, onward to the end, it must mean the same. See the 30th and 31st chapters of Jeremiah.

IV. When their scattering and their gathering are placed together, and when we are told, that *as* they have been scattered, *so* they shall be gathered. Very striking and explicit are the prophecies to this effect in Deuteronomy, where the plainness of the style precludes the idea of figures. How, for instance, could the most ingenious spiritualizer contrive to explain away such a passage as this,—“If any of thine be driven out unto the outmost parts of heaven, from thence will he fetch thee; and the Lord thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers” (Deut. 30:4). See also Jeremiah 23:3; 30:3, 18; Ezekiel 20:34.

V. When the countries are specified, into which they have been scattered, and in which they are dwelling. We find them dwelling in these countries, and God says He will take them out of these, and plant them in their own land again. Does this mean merely, as according to some it does, that Christ is to have a Church in these places, or, according to others, that Israel is to be converted to Christ? Impossible! What can Egypt mean,—and Pathros, and Cush, and Elam, and Shinar, and Hamath, and the islands of the sea? What sort of compound and

incongruous figure can be fashioned out of these? See Isaiah 11:11; 49:12.

VI. When, in the beginning of a prophecy, reference is made to their Egyptian bondage, their Babylonian or Assyrian captivities, the conclusion of the prophecy must concern literal Israel, and refer to a literal deliverance. See Isaiah 52:4. When God alludes to her rescue from Babylonish captivity, and says that He will set His hand the *second* time to recover the remnant of His people, it must be literal Israel that is meant, and a literal restoration that is foretold.

VII. When both their conversion and restoration to their own land are spoken of together in the same passage. This very frequently occurs; and in such cases we do not see how a figurative interpretation can for a moment stand. Were the words which predict their restoration standing by themselves, we can conceive how, by a stroke of ingenuity, it might be possible to impose a spiritual sense upon certain passages, and to exclude all reference to Israel's restoration to their own land, and preeminence among the nations; but when one verse plainly foretells their restoration to their own land, and the next their spiritual conversion to God, it seems to us a perversion and confusion of all language to say, that both these mean the same thing. Take, for example, Ezekiel's prophecy regarding the blessing to be poured out on Israel in the latter day (36:24-28). He had been declaring how they had been "scattered among the heathen, and dispersed through the countries." He then foretells their future prosperity; and first their restoration to their own land: "I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land." This of itself seems plain enough, especially when placed by the side of the description given, a few verses before, of their dispersion, which all admit to be literal. But as if to prevent even the possibility of its being said that this meant conversion, it is immediately added, "*Then* will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you; a new heart also will I

give you; and a new spirit will I put within you." We might instance many similar passages, but this is enough as a specimen. To us such instances appear quite conclusive. Indeed, without a previous determination not to believe the restoration of Israel, we hardly see how any one could for a moment think of disputing the literality of such passages.⁷

There are two passages especially, we believe, on which much is built by some, in maintaining that by Israel and Judah are meant the Christian Church. One is Acts 15:14-17, and the other Hebrews 8:8-12. These are appealed to as resistless proofs that the apostles did interpret these passages regarding Israel and the Christian Church. Let us then briefly inquire whether they do so. The former runs thus: "After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down," &c. Now, as the apostle introduced this quotation to prove that it was God's design, as declared by His prophet Amos, "to visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name," it is said that he meant to interpret the expression, "building the tabernacle of David," of the conversion of the Gentiles. To us it appears plain, that the expression "tabernacle of David" is not the point of his quotation or argument. *That* is in the next verse, where the words "all the Gentiles" occur. It is from these last words that he evidently meant to gather the *principle* for which he was arguing. It is upon this *alone*, and not upon the former expressions,—which we understand in their usual sense, as meaning Israel according to the flesh,—that the weight of his argument lies. All he wanted to establish was, that God had foretold that the Gentiles were to be called in. This the latter verse distinctly asserts; the former at least, if at all, only by figurative inference. We deny, then, that here the apostle meant to affirm that the

⁷ "It appears to me evident that the scene of the future conversion of the Jews is their own land, where it is probable, from Zechariah, *that a supernatural interposition of the Messiah will take place* in their favor." —ROBERT HALL, *Works*, vol. iv, p. 404.

tabernacle of David signified the Gentiles. He quotes the whole passage no doubt, but the part upon which he builds his argument is the latter part of it, where the Gentiles are expressly named. It is very common with the sacred writers in the New Testament to quote the *whole* passage, though only one clause was needed to prove the point in question. As a striking instance of this, we refer to Matthew 12:15, 21, in which Isaiah is cited by the evangelist to illustrate a particular part of the Lord's character, v. 16,—His continually charging those whom He healed not to make Him known. Several verses are quoted, two of them which speak of the Gentiles, though this had nothing to do with the point in hand, which was simply this,—the meek and gentle character of Christ. Much more of the passage is quoted than is actually needed for the proof; and we might as well argue from this passage that Gentiles meant Jews, as from the other that Jews meant Gentiles. Indeed, upon the principles on which our opponents argue in expounding the quotation in the Acts of the Apostles, we do not see how they can refuse the conclusion, that in this passage of Isaiah, cited by Matthew when speaking of his own people, the Jews are designated twice over by the name of Gentiles. But in both places the design of the citation is sufficiently obvious, viz., to establish a particular point or principle from an Old Testament prophecy. *One* clause alone, in each of these, forms the point on which the argument rests, though, as was natural and proper, the whole connected prophecy is quoted at length.

The other citation favorable to the figurative view of the prophecies concerning Israel, is Hebrews 8:8, concerning the new covenant to be made with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It has been argued, that because this is the New Testament covenant, that therefore, Judah and Israel *must* mean the Church of Christ! As well might it be argued, that when the prophets speak of the promise to Abraham, regarding the blessings which were to flow to him and to his seed, through the coming Savior, Abraham did not mean Abraham, but the Church of Christ. The whole of this passage in

Hebrews, and more especially the chapter in Jeremiah from which it is taken, are too clear and explicit to be thus misinterpreted. The apostle's meaning is obvious, and the drift of his quotation as obvious, without the necessity of having recourse to any such unnatural stretch of exposition. He had been speaking of the old covenant,—the covenant made with Israel at Mount Sinai, with all its varied ritual and imperfect priesthood; and he comes to show that all this was to be abolished, and in its place a new covenant was to be made with Israel, *with that Israel* with whom the former covenant had been made, which was done away with in Christ. This was his object, this the drift of his argument, and no quotation could better support that argument than this from Jeremiah, *if literally understood*. If taken spiritually, it furnishes no solid proof of his assertion, that Israel's old economy was to pass away, and a new one was to be established with this same nation,—especially if we consider that he was arguing with Jews, and had been speaking of the literal Israel all along.

But, in saying this, do we deny that it is the new covenant in Christ that he is speaking of, or say that it excludes the Gentiles, or that it does not apply to the universal Church of Christ? No: we maintain all that as decidedly as any can; only we think that it was not the apostle's direct object to establish these in the passage, though it is clear that in proving his immediate point, he establishes all the rest. Abraham's covenant was the Gentiles' covenant too; Abraham's covenant is that upon which the spiritual children of Israel stand; on which the Church of Christ is built: but still, in order to prove this, it is not necessary, as some seem to imagine, that we must prove that Abraham means the Gentiles, or the Church of Christ. And as this passage asserts, that it was, in the first place, with the literal Israel that this new covenant was to be made, so we find it to have been. Messiah, when He came, "confirmed the covenant with many for one week" (Dan. 9:27). He confirmed His own ministry to the Jews; He commanded His first apostles, whom He sent forth before He suffered, to do the same; and in His last

commission to them before He left the earth, while He sent them forth into all the world, He yet told them to begin at Jerusalem, with which we find, in the Acts of the Apostles, they very strictly complied. Doubtless, the passage in Jeremiah speaks of a time still future, in which this covenant is more fully and more gloriously to be confirmed to Israel; but still it was at the abolition of the old economy that this new covenant *began* to be made with them, and when, in the latter day, they are gloriously gathered in, and re-established in peace under Messiah the Prince, their security shall be this same covenant of grace. "I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more" [Heb. 8:12].

I trust that I have said enough to show that such passages as those adverted to, have been misinterpreted, and do really furnish no ground for that spiritualizing application of the prophecies to the Church of Christ on which many dwell. One would imagine, from the eagerness manifested in endeavoring to wrest such promises from the literal Israel, that the very hope of a Gentile depended upon his being able to show that such predictions did really and primarily concern himself. One would suppose that God had given the Gentiles no promises of their own, that they seize with such unsparing rapacity upon Israel's inheritance. Alas for us, if our salvation rests upon our being able to show that Israel in prophecy means the Church of Christ! What Gentile sinner, burdened with guilt, could ever venture to build upon a hope so insecure? We have promises of our own innumerable, promises stable as the ever-lasting hills, and radiant as the everlasting stars, which secure to us all "the unsearchable riches of Christ." And, besides, we have, in another, and what we may call a more *honest* way, all Israel's blessings. They are not blessings *confined* to Israel, just as Abraham's blessings were not confined to him, though promised more directly to him, and to his seed according to the flesh. The spices grew on Gilead, the cedars on Lebanon, and the roses in Sharon, but their fragrance may perfume the

whole world. There is not one promise made to Judah from which we may not extract blessings to ourselves. For what is the chief and most essential part of a promise? It is not the mere words by which God seems to bind Himself; or, to speak after the manner of man, to commit Himself so that He dare not retract. No; it is the manifestation of His love and grace which they exhibit. It is the insight into our Father's heart which they furnish. And if in Israel's promises we learn more of our Father's love, and get a deep insight into our Father's heart, and know that Israel's God is our God too, then, though we cannot say, God spake this to me personally, yet if I learn more of His character, and can thus feed more upon the riches of His grace, I am largely blessed indeed! I can say, "It is enough."

Let us now, for a moment, before we close, glance at the story of this mysterious nation, whose personal interest in the prophecies we have been endeavoring to maintain.

"How doth the city sit solitary that was full of people; how is she become as a widow!" [Lam. 1:1]. Her walls are in the dust; gate, bar, and rampart have gone down together. Her sanctuary no longer reflects the calm light of sunrise over Olivet from the white marble of its glowing walls. The burst of praise from the ten thousands of Israel assembled in holy festival has been silent for ages. Her solemn feasts are over; her altar is overturned; her priests are exiles; her multitudes are like the scattered leaves of autumn; and the "habitations of Jacob" are removed like a shepherd's tent. Her fields are a wilderness; her vineyards are blighted; her pleasant places have become a desolation; the mirth of the land is gone. "Her filthiness was in her skirts, therefore she came down wondrously" [Lam. 1:9]. Alas, for the beautiful city, the joy of the whole earth, the city where David dwelt and Solomon reigned, the city of the great King! Alas for desolate land, the barren soil, forsaken of Jehovah and withering beneath His frown! Alas for the forlorn exiles, the homeless tribes of Israel, that once were the people of the Lord, a chosen generation, a royal priesthood! But she shall yet

rise again. She has dwelt in dust and been clothed with sackcloth, but she shall put on her beautiful garments—garments more glorious than in the days of old. Rebuilt and re-adorned, as the metropolis of the earth, she shall forget her misery in the joy of her second espousals, and remember her shame no more.

In Israel we see the standing memorial of Jehovah's faithfulness and truth. Nothing has failed of all that the Lord had said that He would do for or against that people. All has come literally to pass. The curse has gone forth against them, and every threat has been verified. Yet they are not consumed; they are still beloved for their fathers' sakes, and preserved because of the covenant which cannot be broken. Destined for brighter days, they still live on. Monuments now of God's righteous severity, they are yet to be more signal monuments of His unchanging grace, for "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" [Rom. 5:20]. Tossed from billow to billow upon a single plank, they have weathered centuries of storm, seeing the mightiest vessels part anchor in the blast and go down at their side, themselves buoyant still. *Mersus profundo pulchrior evenit!* ["Immersed in the deep, it rises out more beautiful."⁸] To this day, as hitherto, unfixed, unanchored, unsheltered, unprotected; driven hither and thither by the tide of the tempest, they are awaiting the outburst of the world's last hurricane, which, while it devastates the earth, and strews the sea with shipwreck, shall leave them unharmed, nay, waft them home! What faithfulness, what patience, what unchanging love! In Jehovah's eyes they are precious still; the chosen heritage of God. Their covenant abideth sure; their promises are imperishable. Were it not for these, where had they been? Would they not have perished from the earth, and be found no more among the nations? These promises held them fast, and bound their roots "as with a band of iron and brass," that they should not be swept away nor consumed. Through all these eighteen hundred years they

have been sustained as a nation,—emerging from the smoke and ruin of a thousand cities, rising out of the fragments of a hundred empires, surviving with mysterious tenacity of life, the storm, the plundering, the massacre, the flood, the flame!

The prominence given to Israel in the prophets forces itself vividly upon our notice. Nay, history and prophecy are in this respect alike. Such is Jehovah's purpose; such is one of His ordained channels of self-manifestation. "O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" [Rom. 11:3]. Surely, if anything could humble us Gentiles, it would be the history of the destiny of the slighted Jew, to whom pre-eminence among the nations has not only been given for a few generations, but *entailed* by God's own deed in perpetuity. If any man might boast, the Jew might, more than all. To him pertained the adoption, the glory, and the covenants, the giving of the law, and the service of God. His was a more costly temple than heathen splendor ever reared; his a more august and sacred priesthood; his a nobler and more royal line of princes—the last of that line Jehovah himself incarnate! And was ever a nation so mysteriously indestructible? Plunged into the furnace of Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Grecian, Roman tyranny, it has come forth unconsumed! Kingdom after kingdom has crumbled down, or been swallowed up, yet Israel has walked secure over the *débris* of empires, or stood upon the fragments of each successive wreck, casting his wistful eye towards Jerusalem, the heritage of his nation, and the city of his soul. And can the descendant of that unearthly race not feel his own superior dignity, as, standing amid the ruins of ancient empires past away, and the decay of modern kingdoms falling to pieces around him, he thinks how soon all these shall be as "the chaff of the summer threshing-floor," while he *cannot* perish or be swept away with the dust of their ruins? He feels that, even in his degradation, the nobles of the Gentiles are not his peers. On *his* safety hangs the world's salvation; for in him all nations are to be blessed, and it is he whom God is yet to send forth, to "declare His glory among the

⁸ Horace, *Odes*, 4.4.65.

Gentiles" (Isa. 66:19). And at no distant time shall the outcasts of Israel and the dispersed of Judah return and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads. "Beautiful for situation" shall it yet be seen, the joy of the whole earth, the city of the great King. A more glorious temple shall be there, and a more glorious Shekinah than before. A king shall reign in righteousness, and the isles shall wait for that law which is yet to come forth from Jerusalem, the metropolis of the world.

In them we see the true *romance* of history. Theirs is, indeed, a strange story, oftentimes more like a vision than a reality; yet true, pre-eminently true; not lost in fable or mist, but one entire certainty from the beginning hitherto. There is light along all its course, as, commencing with Abraham, in Ur of the Chaldees, it winds its various way, from age to age, through innumerable mazes; for it a four thousand years' story, and not yet concluded. Who of all the nations of the earth has such a story to tell?

Yet the *general* history of the nation does not give us all the romance of their strange annals. True, their *national* history is a marvelous one indeed, too marvelous to be read without feelings of solemnity and awe. Yet the *private episodes* of Jewish story furnish us with scenes more thrilling still. The personal narrative, the secret history of the Jew, furnish scenes of deeper and more startling interest than can be found elsewhere. The novelist even feels this. Hence we find that the most striking portions of some of the most striking works of fiction are those in which the Jew takes, if not the foreground, at least some part of the scene. He stands before us like a friendless orphan, drooping in form, and desolate in look and voice. He seems like the inhabitant of another star, banished from his native orb for some mysterious crime that controls his destiny and haunts his footsteps; a crime which he will not confess, but cannot expiate; a crime for which he seems to wear hidden sackcloth, and which withers him into the saplessness of age before his manhood has blossomed. The exiled loneliness, the calm familiarity with sorrow, the

silent resignation, the melancholy majesty, the passionate patriotism, the ineradicable and lofty nationality,—all these characteristics, coupled with a lot the heaviest and sharpest that sin is heir to, form a subject of most thrilling interest, even to a vain and unthinking world. It is so sad, yet so real; so strange, and yet so true!

Some may think this all the more sentimental than true; or, if true, at least having in it more of the poetical than the profitable element of truth. In answer to this, I might say, that if it be romance, it is at least the romance of Scripture; if it be poetry and sentiment, it is the poetry of naked *fact*; it is not the fond sentiment of an earthly dreamer, but the Divine sentiment of an Infinite Mind, the thoughts and utterance of the only wise God. But, further, we argue that it is the reverse of the unprofitable or vain. This is not the fit time for me to argue this question, which would stretch over a volume; but it is sufficient to say, that a history which God has taken much pains to develop,—a history of which He has given us far more than a vague outline,—a history which seems to occupy so much of His thoughts and purposes,—a history by means of whose events He is bringing out into view His own gracious and holy character,—such a history must be thoroughly practical and useful.

The gospel is God's testimony of Himself in *words*. Israel's history is God's testimony to Himself in *facts*. The gospel is God's declaration, that where "sin abounded, grace has much more abounded" [Rom. 5:20]. Israel is the living, visible testimony to this marvelous and blessed truth. The history of Israel, in every age, preaches to us the gospel of the grace of God. It is throughout, the story of man's sin and of God's deep and untiring love. It shows us how manifold, how endless are man's ways of sinning; and it shows us how still more manifold and endless are God's ways of forgiving, and loving, and blessing. Israel is the nation in which man's rebellion, man's wickedness, man's hatred of God, are brought most clearly out to view, that we may know what man is, even in his best estate, and with every possible advantage; that we may know

what a human heart is, even when plied with every motive to love, and serve, and honor the God that made it. And Israel is also the nation where the good that is in God is ever showing itself superior to the evil that is in man; where love and grace are ever rising immeasurably above, and stretching inconceivably beyond, the uttermost extent of human enormity and sin. This surely is profitable.

But there is another view of the subject which may be taken, a view more striking, perhaps, to the general eye,—the relationship of Israel's history to that of the world. There is a mysterious connection here, which we can easily see, though we cannot readily explain.

Israel dwelt alone, and was not numbered among the nations. Yet all nations were in some way affected by her. There are few nations whose history materially bears upon others, especially the distant and the isolated. But the influence of Israel was over all. Separated by God from all the earth, she yet came into unseen contact with it in all its motions and changes. All God's thoughts concerning the world, and His dealing with its people, are linked to His purposes respecting the Jew and his land. Israel was set up as God's model government to the nations, and shall again be set up as such, in the latter day, though with far greater stability and glory. All things pertaining to her, Scripture connects more than in any other case, with the glory of God and the kingdom of His Son. Round her prophecy clusters; and upon her the world's destinies seem to hinge. Her past exaltation, her present abasement, and her future glory, are all most mysteriously woven into the world's history, past, present, and to come. Without Israel, that history is a blank,—a blank, we mean, to the believing eye, not the wise and learned of this world, for the soul that can enjoy an existence without Christ can see no blank in history though Israel be not there. Yet even an unbelieving historian cannot help feeling that there is some strange, though perhaps invisible tie, which has connected the fate of Israel with the destinies of empires. Israel has been the pulse of the world. As ocean rises and falls, along its far-scattered coasts, by the silent

pressure of a distant planet—a pressure which intervening clouds have no power to diminish—so have the nations of the earth owed their *tides* to Israel, and this as truly in her darkest as in her brightest age.

“Persepolis, Rome, Babylon;
For this ye sank, for this ye shone!”

The streams of the nations flow, tinged with drops, from the cup of Israel; bright with her blessings, or discolored with her sorrows. All her invaders, from the Assyrian to the Roman, from Shalmaneser to Titus, only dispersed her over the nations to exert a wider influence. The scattered dust of Samaria has sprinkled every nation of the East, and the exploded fragments of Jerusalem have found their way into every kingdom of the West. There are few nations or kingdoms that have not, to some extent, felt their silent, passive influence. Like the Jesuits, though not with their accursed ends, they have influenced courts, and turned, like a hidden rock, the currents of empires. Unnamed and unacknowledged, they have presided at royal councils. The financial prosperity of nations has taken its impulse from them, advancing or receding at their will. With the sinews of war in their hands, though with not even one soldier in the ranks, and with but little interest in the issue of the conflict,—for whoever triumphed, still *they* were oppressed,—they waged war and made peace at pleasure. Theirs has been an influence everywhere felt, but nowhere either acknowledged or honored; and in the midst of all this, suffering, torture, shame, and death, have been the unvarying lot of the broken-hearted Jew. In what city have they not been dwellers, or sojourners at least, since first they ceased to have a city of their own? Whom have they not had for a sovereign, since the day they cried, “We will have no king but Cæsar?” [John 19:15]. They have seen no temple for many generations, since the hour when the Roman torch laid in ashes their beautiful house where their fathers praised; yet they hold fast their ancient worship, a spectacle of wondrous constancy, and blind fidelity stronger than death. No high priest has ministered at their altar since the time that Jerusalem was led

captive; yet have they maintained their old traditional religion, amid nations of infidels and idolaters, in spite of everything that the torture or the bribe could accomplish to make them renounce their faith. What a monument! And who can say how much the very sight of it has wrought in the earth?

Many a nation has been blessed because they favored Zion; but who has ever prospered that injured her? He who has touched her has touched the apple of God's eye. Egypt was scourged because she opposed her. Edom was cursed and plagued because he remembered not the brotherly covenant. Assyria was broken because she overflowed Immanuel's land. Babylon was brought low because she held her in captivity. And soon, too, shall mystic Babylon receive her awful recompense for the blood and torture of the persecuted race. It was an infidel king of the last century who said, "Meddle not with these Jews; no man ever touched them and prospered." Jerusalem has truly been "a cup of trembling to all people round about, a burdensome stone for all people; and all that burdened themselves with her have been cut to pieces."

These are things which the Church of Christ ought especially to remember, whether she considers the duty of favoring those whom God favors, or the blessings which He promises to those who seek their peace, or the curses with which He has cursed those who have trodden them down. Whether, then, we call to mind the blessings which have flowed from them to us, and see how their fall has been our rising, or observe the manner in which the prophets represent the future destiny of the world as hanging upon the fortunes of Israel; whether we

remember their once high dignity, as those to whom belonged the glory and the covenants, the giving of the law and the promises, or their long misery and degradation and dismemberment; whether we honor them as the kinsmen of Christ, or pity them as the murderers of the Lord of glory; let us look on Israel as God looks on her; let us understand the deep meaning of her history, and learn to sing her songs.⁹

⁹ About the middle of the 17th century, Samuel Petto published a work called "The Revelation Unveiled," which, along with his book on the Covenants, was republished in 1820, with a recommendation from Drs. M'Crie, Paxton, &c. In it he makes very frequent reference to "Israel, and the things concerning them that are to fall out in the latter day." After speaking at length of the time of Jacob's trouble, he goes on to mention, as next in order, "the setting up of the glorious kingdom of Jesus Christ, the New Jerusalem, or the glory of the Church here, a thousand years (Rev. 20-21)." He then adds, "This rise or first state of this kingdom will be speedily after the resurrection of the witnesses, and the first conversion of the Jews, and before the thousand years begin. . . . This thousand years will be a glorious time; not absolutely as if sinless; but comparatively, or compared with any former state of the Church. *Possibly it may be ushered in by a personal appearance of Christ in the clouds*; but I cannot say that it will be by the personal presence and continuance or reigning of Christ on the earth. Now will Ezekiel's city and temple be erected, the glory of which will be that the name of it from that day shall be Jehovah Shammah, the Lord is there. Here will begin the state of the New Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven, and is not by our going up to heaven. Then shall be given to Christ, as Daniel 7:14, dominion and glory and kingdom."—P. 136.

Father, now to Israel raise
Thy servant and thy Son,
Christ, our heavenly David, place
On his terrestrial throne.

*Charles Wesley
on Ezekiel 37:24*