

The Prophets of Israel

JEREMIAH

"If there be a prophet among you, I, the Lord, will make myself known unto him in a vision and I will speak unto him in a dream."

"They have Moses and the Prophets, let them hear them."

It is not only a good and pleasant thing, but a very profitable exercise of the mind, to occasionally renew our familiarity with the writings of the ancient prophets of the Lord, by devoting ourselves to the special study of some one of their books, quite independently of our daily readings.

This time, however, we purpose taking merely a cursory glance at the personal history and the wonderful writings of the "weeping prophet" of Judah—Jeremiah, who has been fitly styled the "evening star" of the declining day of Judah's commonwealth.

Born in Anathoth, a small village in the land of Benjamin, but comparatively close to Jerusalem, he began to prophesy at a very early age (Ch. 1: 6), in the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign (Ch. 1:2), and he continued his work all through the troubled times of the Babylonian invasions.

The great burden of prophecy against Israel, the sister-kingdom of the ten tribes, had been fulfilled; but Judah was spared a little longer.

Jeremiah was then called of God and directed to warn Judah of a similar fate
(Ch. 1: 14-19).

The performance of this duty brought upon his head the wrath of his own family (Ch. 12: 6), and the cruel resentment of the men of Anathoth, the place of his birth and his village home.

This in time led to the prophet's removal to the City of Jerusalem (Ch. 11:2), where through his great work, so faithfully performed, he doubtless, in reality, soon became a powerful ally to King Josiah, in carrying into effect the wonderful reformation of that day: an account of which is recorded in 2nd Kings, twenty-third chapter.

Therefore, we can readily believe that during the remainder of the years covering the reign of this good king, Jeremiah would be practically unmolested in his heaven-born mission of proclaiming to the people the Commandments of the Lord (Ch. 1:7).

This reformation, however, was in reality, but a forcible repression of the idolatrous worship of the pagan gods, by the righteous king and his faithful party, then in power: it was not popular with the nation as a whole, though for the time being, they passively complied with the orders of the king.

But upon the death of Josiah on the fatal field of Megiddo, the party of corruption, whose base interests were bound up and identified with the various forms of idolatrous worship, then came into power, led for the short period of three months by Jehoahaz, and then by that wicked prince, Jehoiakim, whom the Pharaoh of Egypt made king in the place of Jehoahaz.

Jeremiah, who hitherto was at least protected by the influence of the good king Josiah, then became the object of cruel persecution by the party of corrupt worship; with whom he must long have been an object of dislike, because of his incessant prophesying of coming evil, which the faithful prophet still continued to proclaim to the king and his people.

Jeremiah was now publicly reviled by his own countrymen and accused of a lack of

patriotism, as Christadelphians of these latter days have been, because of their observance and submission to the commandments of Christ.

From this time onward the prophet was subjected to much suffering, shame and imprisonment; nevertheless, his warnings became more and more definite, and his prophecies were written in a book at the express command of the Lord (Ch. 30: 2). Although this book was burnt by king Jehoiakim (Ch. 36: 22-25) another copy was written and preserved (Ch. 36: 32).

Because Judah at this time was alternately the vassal of the Pharaoh of Egypt and the king of Babylon, the question: Whom shall we serve? was constantly uppermost (Ch. 27: 9), and the words of Jeremiah were very disturbing; and as a consequence, the Egyptians on the one hand and the Babylonians on the other, became the waking thought and the nightly dream of the king and his people; they were greatly perplexed, not knowing which way to turn for safety, and yet they "refused to hear" the word of the Lord as spoken by this prophet.

Jeremiah obtained some little respite from imprisonment during the short reign of Coniah and the longer period of Zedekiah's kingship, and he continued to speak faithfully the word of the Lord as against that of the false prophets (Ch. 28: 13-17).

But in the latter part of Zedekiah's reign he was again apprehended at the instigation of the princes and imprisoned, from whence he was not liberated until, by Nebuchadnezzar, just previous to the burning of the City and Temple.

Sometime after this event Jeremiah was forcibly carried into Egypt by Johanan, against the commandment of the Lord (Ch. 43: 1-7), where, after further testifying the word of the Lord against Egypt and Babylon, he died, after a long and faithful ministry extending over forty years.

When Judah's sun went down below the political horizon, as predicted by Jeremiah (Ch. 15: 9), there began a series of calamities, only to be paralleled in later times by the still more awful catastrophe which befell the people in the terrible Roman war.

Jeremiah's contemporaries.

These were Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Daniel and Ezekiel. Zephaniah was one of the earliest of Jeremiah's co-workers, prophesying at the beginning of Josiah's reign (Zeph. 1: 1). Habakkuk was the next in order, uttering his predictions in the earlier part of Jehoiakim's reign (Hab. 1: 5, 6).

About this time Daniel being yet quite young was carried away captive to Babylon (Dan. 1: 1-6), where he became famous for his God-given wisdom as a revealer of secrets and an interpreter of wonderful royal dreams, and as one of the greatest among the prophets of the Lord.

A few years later Ezekiel was led away as a captive by Nebuchadnezzar and given a place of abode in the locality of the river Chebar, where, although far removed from his native land, and the company of any of God's prophets, "the word of the Lord came expressly unto him" (Ch. 1: 3).

There is a striking and remarkable connection between the predictions of these two eminent prophets—Jeremiah and Ezekiel. While there is a marked difference and a great dissimilarity in the style of their writing and their mode of statement, yet when dealing with the same subject they are singularly accordant. It could not be otherwise with the subjects of inspiration—"holy men of God who spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."

There was, however, a striking difference also in the disposition and temperament of these two men, which is easily discernible in their writings. While Ezekiel displays great vigor and energy, with a robust mind of the strongest and the firmest texture, Jeremiah exhibits a mentality of a softer and more delicate tissue, especially susceptible to sorrowful emotions.

Nevertheless, like his illustrious contemporary, he never shrank from duty, nor was he ever in the least degree intimidated by reproach, imprisonment or the threat of death.

JEREMIAH'S PROPHECIES.

In this prophet's writings we have a wonderfully contrasted portraiture of Jerusalem in gloom and glory.

The prevailing tone of Jeremiah's prophecies is that of melancholy, because he was so deeply and so sorrowfully impressed by the impending judgments which threatened the very life of his people and nation.

The threatened punishments from the Lord were indeed terrifying and constituted an all-sufficient cause for his depression of spirit. Let us note just one of his messages:

"Thus saith the Lord, Behold I will melt them, and try them; for how shall I do for the daughter of my people? Shall I not visit them for these things? saith the Lord: Shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this? I will make Jerusalem heaps, and a den of dragons; and I will make the cities of Judah desolate, without an inhabitant" —chap. 9: 7, 9, 11.

The fulfillment of this prediction brought forth his lamentations, in which he again styles Zion "the daughter of Judah", and his words are equally mournful and full of gloom: —

"How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people! From the daughter of Zion all her beauty is departed: her princes are become like harts that find no pasture, and they are gone without strength before the pursuer" —chap. 1: 1, 6.

"Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger."

"The Lord hath trodden under foot all my mighty men in the midst of me: he hath called an assembly against me to crush my young men: the Lord hath trodden the virgin, the daughter of Judah, as in a winepress" —vs. 12 and 15.

Throughout the Lamentations of Jeremiah, the ruin and desolation of the city and temple are set forth under a variety of appropriate images, with a constant flow of graceful and pathetic eloquence, that was wholly and admirably in keeping with the mournful character of the situation.

But when the prophet approaches the splendid theme of "The Sure Mercies of David," his style at once becomes not only elevated and elegant, but he rises to the excellent and sublime: he equals and perhaps excels Ezekiel, approaching even to a high degree, the dignity and splendor of Isaiah's gilded and glowing scenes and shining prospects of the kingdom under Christ. Let us give an illustration: —

"Fear not thou, O my servant Jacob, and be not dismayed O Israel, for, behold, I will save thee from afar off, and thy seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return, and be in rest and at ease, and none shall make him afraid.

Fear thou not, O Jacob my servant, saith the Lord: for I am with thee; for I will make a full end of all the nations whither I have driven thee: but I will not make a full end of thee, but correct thee in measure: yet will I not leave thee wholly unpunished" —chap. 46: 27, 28.

"Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David, a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, the Lord our Righteousness"—chap. 23: 5, 6.

In these noble and lofty words, and in this elevated style, portraying such a high standard of perfection in the Kingdom restored to Israel; this eminent prophet consoled and encouraged the righteous among the people with these precious promises of a mighty future deliverance under David's Greater Son, and assured them that God's great blessing of a righteous government and a lasting peace would brighten Judah's horizon at a time when—

"They shall call Jerusalem the Throne of the Lord, and all the nations shall be gathered unto it, to the Name of the Lord, to Jerusalem"—chap. 3:17.

Thus Jeremiah predicted in glowing colors the future glory of Zion, when God's covenant with his people shall surely come into force (Ch. 31:10, 31-40).

About six hundred and fifty years after Jeremiah had penned these comforting and uplifting words, we find Paul the Apostle exhorting the "Men of Israel" in Antioch, saying:

"Of this man's seed hath God according to his promise, raised unto Israel, a saviour, Jesus."
"And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the Sure Mercies of David"—Acts 13: 23, 34.

The sacred writings of the prophet Jeremiah fairly teem with references to those "Times of Refreshing from the presence of the Lord", when God "shall send Jesus Christ" to the earth again.

Pardon us if we trespass upon your time by making a few further quotations from this charming prophet's pen—

"Like as I have brought all this great evil upon, this people, so will I bring upon them all the good that I have promised them"—chap. 32: 42.

The "evil" was literal, and so "the good" will be, and the distinct character of "the good" is carefully defined in the next chapter—

"Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will perform THAT good thing which I have promised. ... I will cause the Branch of Righteousness to grow up unto David; and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land"—chap. 33: 14-16.
"Israel is the rod of his inheritance, the Lord of hosts in his name. Thou art my battle ax and weapons of war: for with thee will I break in pieces the nations, and with thee will I destroy Kingdoms"—chap. 51: 19, 20.
"The Gentiles shall come unto thee from the ends of the earth, and shall say, Surely our fathers have inherited lies, vanity, and things wherein there is no profit"—chap. 16: 19.

What an unparalleled revolution among the nations is here indicated as taking place when Jesus comes! What a mighty and fundamental change in the government of all the nations upon the earth, when the Lord shall inherit Judah! What a profound and unprecedented

reformation in belief, hope, doctrine and practice will be inaugurated, when, to use the words of the prophet, the Lord "will set up shepherds" over the people, and "give them pastors according to His own heart, which shall feed them with knowledge and understanding" (Ch. 3: 15, 23: 4).

This unparalleled religious movement will attract the wondering eyes of all nations, causing them to express their surprise, in the words quoted above: "Surely our fathers have inherited lies," etc., and "the nations shall bless themselves in the Lord, and in Him shall they glory" (Ch. 4: 2).

PROPHECIES LITERALLY FULFILLED.

Occasionally a voice is heard from some of the churches claiming that the words of Jeremiah's prophecies should be spiritualized and made to teach something wholly different from what he has written.

But there is not the slightest foundation for such a claim. Indeed the evidence is all the other way. The historical development of this prophet's predictions proves the literal fulfillment. All of Jeremiah's prophecies thus far fulfilled have been fulfilled literally, which affords the strongest evidence that all his other predictions will be accomplished in like manner.

Jeremiah's well-balanced and eloquent pronouncements prove that he was a perfect master of expression, and his words and well-rounded sentences need no doctoring. Therefore, all his predictions must be understood in their true nature and meaning.

It may be interesting, just here, to cite a few instances, from among many, showing how literally these prophecies have been fulfilled.

Jehoiakim. — "He shall be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem"—chap. 22: 19.

"It is certain Jehoiakim was slain, but whether in one of the actions, or, as Josephus says, after the surrender, we cannot determine. His body remained exposed without the city, under the circumstances foretold by the prophet (Bible Ency. p. 911).

Zion. — "Zion shall be ploughed as a field"—chap. 26: 18.

Gibbon wrote: "After the final destruction of the temple, by the arms of Titus and Hadrian, a ploughshare was drawn over the consecrated ground as a sign of perpetual interdiction" (Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, Ch. 23).

Zion. — "Because of the mountain of Zion, which is desolate, the foxes walk upon it"—Lam. 5: 18.

Van Lennip wrote: "We have repeatedly spied the fox running along the top of an old wall" (Bible Lands, p. 278).

70 years. — "After seventy years be accomplished at Babylon, I will cause you to return to this place"—chap. 29: 10.

"Now in the first year of Cyrus, King of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord, stirred up the spirit of Cyrus," etc., etc. (Ezra 1: 1).

Babylon. — "The broad walls of Babylon shall be utterly broken, and her high gates shall be burned with fire"—chap. 51: 58.

Herodotus wrote: "As soon as Darius became master of the place he leveled the walls and took away the gates" (Thalia, c. 159).

Edom. — "Concerning Edom: Is wisdom no more in Teman? Is counsel perished from the prudent"—chap 49: 7.

Alex. Keith wrote: "No Temanite can now discourse with either the wisdom or the pathos of Eliphaz of old. Wisdom is no more in Teman, and understanding has perished out of the Mount of Esau" (Evidence from Prophecy, p. 157).

Noph. — "Noph shall be waste and desolate without an inhabitant"— chap. 46: 19.

"We recognize in the singular disappearance of the city of Memphis (the ancient Noph—B.J.D.), the fulfillment of the words of Jeremiah, ' Noph shall be waste and desolate without an inhabitant' " (Smith's Diet, of the Bible, p. 686).

Dispersion.—" I will deliver them to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth for their hurt, to be a reproach and a proverb, a taunt and a curse, in all places whither I shall drive them"—chap. 24: 9.

Alex. Keith says: "There is not a country on the face of the earth where the Jews are unknown. They are found alike in Europe, Asia, America and Africa. They are citizens of the world, without a country" (Evid. from Proph. p. 69).

Preservation. —"Fear thou not, O Jacob, saith the Lord: for I am with thee; for I will make a full end of all the nations whither I have driven thee: but I will not make a full end of thee"

— chap. 46: 28.

Bishop Newton wrote: "The preservation of the Jews through so many ages, and the total destruction of their enemies, are wonderful events; and are made still more wonderful by being signified beforehand, by the spirit of prophecy, as we find particularly in the prophet Jeremiah: ' I will make a full end of the nations whither I have driven thee, but I will not make a full end of thee'" (Dissert. 8. sec. 2).

Of all these and many others of Jeremiah's fulfilled prophecies, not one jot or title has failed, which is a clear demonstration that God hath spoken through this prophet.

Therefore, seeing that what God hath spoken concerning the past, has been fulfilled to the very letter, we have in this fact, a divine assurance, that what He has spoken relating to the future will be fulfilled in like manner.

In other words, God's faithfulness in the past, with respect to these things, is a guarantee for the future: the historical aspect of the matter, not only assists, but strengthens and fortifies the prophetic; and encourages, comforts and confirms us in our patient waiting for Christ; and therefore, we can confidently testify with Jeremiah, that we believe—

"It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord "Lam.3:26. (B.J.D).
