

Hosea

Lectures on the Minor Prophets.

W. Kelly.

The prophecy of Hosea naturally divides itself into two principal divisions with minor sections. The first consists of Hosea 1, 2, and 3; the second, of the rest of the book. Within these greater divisions, however, we have distinct parts.

The first chapter presents the prophet with his ministry "in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel." He was therefore a contemporary of Isaiah, who prophesied during the same kings, save that in the case of Hosea only do we hear of the then reigning king of Israel, of whom, rather than Judah, our prophet treats. For the word of Jehovah to him takes into account the condition of Israel as a whole, and particularly uses the dismal condition of Ephraim for the moral good of Judah. This is true of the whole book, which is remarkable for its occupation simply with the Jew, without noticing (as do other prophets) the Gentiles either for judgment or for blessing.

Hosea is, one might say, exclusively devoted to the ancient people of God, with a very slight but remarkable exception in the first chapter; but even it is couched in terms so enigmatical (and this, I believe, with divine intention for a special end), that many have failed to discern the truth contemplated in consequence of not using the light supplied in the New Testament. But there cannot be a more striking example than this very instance affords of the all-importance of using one part of scripture, not to correct indeed — this were impossible and irreverent — but better to understand another. In order to profit by the fuller revelation of the mind of God, we do well to read the earlier communications in the strongest light vouchsafed to us. It is one mind conveyed by one Spirit; and God can give us grace by dependence on Himself to guard us, as far as is consistent with our moral condition, from that narrowness to which we are all too prone, making certain portions of scripture our favourites, so as to interfere with due heed to the rest of the word. Those who indulge in these thoughts cannot be expected to understand the word of God, and, in what they make their one-sided study, are apt to fall into singular and sometimes fatal mistakes. The most precious truths of God, if they are used in an exclusive way, may by the enemy be turned to the support of serious error. Thus there would be danger if there were, for instance, the systematic limiting of the mind to the resurrection or heavenly side of divine truth. Or again, take prophecy; and how withering to the soul when that part of scripture practically becomes a monopoly? Take the church — for it does not matter what — and in it there is no security one whit more. The reason is simple; the secret of power, blessing, security, and communion is found, not in resurrection or heaven, not in prophecy nor in the church, nor in any other conceivable branch of truth, but in Christ, who alone gives the whole truth. Consequently we see that what we all know to be a doctrine and a necessary principle in God's revelation is true also as applied to every detail of practical experience.

In this case, then, the date of Hosea indicates his interest in Israel, and the work that God assigned him in reference to the twelve-tribed nationality of His people, when the ruin of Israel was at hand, and that of Judah was ere long to follow. Brief as his handling of his subject is, there is a remarkable completeness in the prophecy; and the moral element is as prominent in the second part, as the dispensational is in the first. The parenthesis of Gentile empire is quite omitted throughout. He is filled with the afflictions and the guilt of Israel as a whole, and, more than any other of the twelve

shorter prophets, breaks forth into passionate and renewed grief over the people. The book accordingly abounds, as none other does so much, in the most abrupt transitions, which therefore make the style of Hosea singularly difficult in some respects, and, it may be added too, far more so to us just because of its intensely Jewish character. Not being Jews, we do not come under their character of relationship; but those who are to be called as Jews by and by will understand it well. They, having that position, and being thus called (though through the sense of the deepest sins on their part, at the same time knowing the yearnings of the Spirit of God over them), will enter into, as I believe they will profit by, that which to us presents difficulty because we are not in the same position.

The first chapter mainly consists of symbolic action, which represents the course of God's purposes. "The beginning of the word of Jehovah by Hosea. And Jehovah said to Hosea, Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms* and children of whoredoms: for the land hath committed great whoredom, departing from Jehovah." Nothing can be more evident than this declared object. The prophet is commanded to do that which was necessarily most painful in itself, and suggestive of what he as a man of God must have felt to be humbling as well as repulsive. But such was the attitude of Israel to their God, and Jehovah would make the prophet and those who heeded the prophecy to understand in measure what He must feel as to His people. "So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim; which conceived, and bare him a son. And Jehovah said unto him, Call his name Jezreel; for yet a little while, and I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu, and will cause to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel. And it shall come to pass at that day, that I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel." This was the first great blow. Israel was to be smitten in the house of Jehu, the avenger of the blood-guiltiness that had been brought in by the idolatrous Jezebel. Jehu was a rough man, vain and ambitious, suited notwithstanding to deal in his rude fashion with that which had dishonoured Jehovah — a man far enough outside the current of the feelings of the Spirit of God, but none the less employed in an external way to deal with the evident and open evil of Ahab's house and Israel.

{*The very least we can say is that the expression intimated to the prophet what Gomer was going to be. But it must be allowed that the phrase naturally conveys the impression that she had already been guilty of an impure life too common where idolatry reigned. If Salmon begat Boaz of Rahab the harlot, it is not hard to conceive the Lord commanding the prophet to take Gomer to wife as a symbolic parable to Israel. It may be worth noticing that, while in ver. 3 she is said to have borne "him" a son, this is not the phrase, but one more vague, in verses 6 and 8. The mother's character might suffice to stamp itself on the children; but the absence of the pronoun in the ease of Lo-ruhamah and Lo-ammi, as contrasted with Jezreel is under the circumstances remarkable. }

Nevertheless this, as it had no root in God, so it had no strength to maintain itself against other evils. Hence, although it suited the policy of Jehu to deal with certain gross idolatries, the political-religious evil that characterized the kingdom of Israel seemed necessary to sustain him against the house of David. Consequently, as he had no conscience as to the sin of Jeroboam, this was judged of Jehovah in due time. God smote not only Jehu's house, but Israel. The kingdom was to pass, though it might linger for a little while afterwards; but it was smitten of God. This is what is represented by Jezreel. God would scatter in due time. The Assyrian broke the power of Israel in the valley of Jezreel (afterwards called Esdraelon), a scene of covetousness and blood from first to last.

Then again we find a daughter appears, whose name was to be called Lo-ruhamah, a name which expresses the absence of pity towards the people. No more mercy was to be shown. Thus the failure of the kingdom of Israel, which soon followed after the dealing with Jehu's house, was not then complete. There would be still more judgment from God; for He says, "I will no more have mercy upon the house

of Israel." Jezreel was but the beginning of the judgments of God. "I will utterly take them away." It was not therefore the collapse of the kingdom of Jehu only, but Israel as a whole was to be swept from the land, never more to be restored as a separate polity. "But," says He in the very same breath, "I will have mercy upon the house of Judah, and will save them by Jehovah their God, and will not save them by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen." The Assyrian was allowed to destroy the kingdom of Israel, but was himself checked by divine power when he hoped to carry off Judah.

Thus there was a lengthening of the tranquillity for Judah. They, at least for the time, exhibited fidelity to Jehovah in their measure. Afterwards another child is born — a son; and "then said God, Call his name Lo-ammi: for ye are not my people, and I will not be to you." It was no longer therefore simply a case of breaking up Israel completely, but Judah now comes into judgment. As long as the royal tribe stood, there was still a nucleus round which all the people might be gathered. As long as the house of David was true in any measure with Judah attached yet far from being true, God could (morally speaking) yet work recovery, or at any rate He could make them, as it were, swell out into a great people. But now, on the proved faithlessness of the innermost circle, God represents the solemn crisis by the birth of the son called Lo-ammi. Yet there is no notice of the Babylonish conqueror. The prophet abruptly passes by the captivity of Judah, and at once goes forward to the glorious reversal of all the sentences of woe. It is the reunion of all the tribes, but not the scanty return under Zerubbabel. A greater is here, even Messiah. Undoubtedly He is chosen, given and appointed to them by God; but it was important also to show that they will yield willing and active subjection. Gathered together, Israel and Judah shall make (or appoint) themselves one head, and shall come (or go) up out of the land: not Babylon or Assyria, or even the earth at large, I think, but rather an expression of their union religiously in the same solemn assemblies and feasts, as we have already seen them one people under one head. It was accomplished neither after the captivity nor when Christ came, but strikingly the reverse. It remains to be fulfilled when He comes to reign over the earth. "For," then indeed, "great [shall be] the day of Jezreel." God shall sow His people in His land, not scatter them out of it. It is the day not of humiliation but of manifested glory. "Yet," says He in His very sentence of judgment on Judah, "the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, in the place where it shall be said unto them, Ye [are] not my people, it shall be said unto them, [Ye are] the sons of the living God."

Observe the remarkable change here. It is the scripture already referred to as the mysterious intimation of the call of the Gentiles in pure grace. This, though distinctly taught in Romans 9, surprises many readers. The reason is because we are apt to regard all as an antithesis in a merely human or limited fashion. If any man of God on the face of the earth had had the writing of the sentence left to himself, had there not been the full power of God which is meant by inspiration in its true and proper sense, it seems quite inconceivable that this sentence could ever have been written. Who would have said it, let him be supposed the best of men, if he loved Israel as a good Jew? Least of all surely Hosea, whose heart was all on fire for the people, both in horror on account of their wickedness and in yearning after their blessedness. But for that reason he of himself would have said, not "Ye are not my people," but Ye shall be made my faithful people. No, this is not what God says, but something quite different. The strong bias so natural even to a good man would have rendered it out of the question to speak as Hosea does. We find it hard to take in, even when written plainly before our eyes, the distinct teaching of God, conveying as it does an unexpected form of thought and an altogether new subject. The Spirit inspired him and can teach us.

This, as hinted before, is the scripture which the apostle Paul employs in Romans 9, as is well known. There he is vindicating, as is plain, the sovereign call of God — the only resource for man

where all is ruined. How beautifully this fits in with our prophet is evident. The ruin of Israel was already there; the ruin of Judah was impending. All was doomed. What then can man fall back on? If the people of God on the earth turned out only a mass of ruins on one side or another, what was there to look to? Nothing and none but God, not His law, but His sovereign grace. Accordingly this is exactly what does come in; as indeed the sovereignty of God must always be the help and sustainment and joy of a soul that is thoroughly beaten out of itself when its evil is truly judged before God. But it often takes a long while to break a man down to that point. Hence it is that many feel difficulties about it, unless perhaps on their death-bed. Then at least, if anywhere, man is true. God is true always; but man (I am speaking now only of such as are born of God) then parts company with those visions, or rather fitful shadows, which had disordered and misled him during the activities of life. Then indeed he realizes what he is as well as what God is. Accordingly, if he lose all confidence in himself in every possible way, it is only to enjoy a confidence, never so well known before, in God Himself.

This is precisely what we find here in the reasonings of the apostle Paul. It is naturally offensive to the pride of man's heart, and more particularly to a Jew's. For had they not received magnificent promises from God? It was a great difficulty to them, and it sounds very natural and formidable, how it was possible that the promises of God should — I may not say fail, but — *seem* to fail. But this came from looking simply at themselves with the promises of God. We must remember that the Bible does not contain merely the promises — it largely consists, and particularly the Old Testament, of a divine history of the responsibility of man. We must leave room for both, so as not to let the responsibility of man overthrow the promises of God; but, on the other hand, not to neutralize the responsibility of the one because of the promises of the other.

The tendency of all men is to become what people call either Arminians or Calvinists; and a hard thing it is to hold the balance of truth without wavering to either side. There is nothing, however, too hard for the Lord; and the word of God is the unfailing preservative from either one or the other. I am perfectly persuaded — spite of partisans who think only of their own views, or freethinkers who have no difficulty in allowing that both are there — that neither Arminianism nor Calvinism is in the Bible, and that they are both thoroughly wrong without even the smallest justification. The fact is, that the tendency to either is deeply seated in unrenewed minds — that is, the same man may be an Arminian at one time and a Calvinist at another; and it is likely that, if he has been a violent Arminian one day, he may become a violent Calvinist to-morrow. But the roots of both lie in man and in his onesidedness. The truth of God is in His word as the revelation of Christ by the Spirit, and nowhere else.

So it will be observed in Romans 9 how completely the apostle sets aside the Jewish misuse of the promises of God. By a chain of the most convincing facts and testimonies of the Old Testament urged in this wonderful chapter, he compels the Jew to abandon the flattering conceit of national election, used absolutely and exclusively as was his wont; for really it is a conceit of himself after all. If they hold to the exclusive pretensions of Israel as simply deriving from Abraham in the line of flesh (which was their point), in that case they must accept others to be their companions; for Abraham had more sons than Isaac, and Isaac had another son than Jacob. The ground of flesh therefore is utterly indefensible. A mere lineal descent would have let in the Ishmaelites, for instance; and of them the Jew would not hear. If he pleaded that Ishmael sprang from Hagar, a slave, be it so; but what of Edom, born of the same mother as well as father, of Isaac and Rebecca, twin brother of Jacob himself? Consequently the ground taken was palpably unsound and untenable. We must therefore fall back upon the sole resource for man's evil and ruin — God's sovereignty and gracious call. This was so much the more in point, because there was a time, even in the early history of the chosen people, when nothing less than God could have preserved it and given a ray of hope. It was not the Ishmaelites, not the

Edomites, not the Gentiles, but Israel, who made the calf of gold. Had God dealt with them according to what they had been there to Him, must there not have been utter and immediate destruction? It is referred to now because of the moral principles connected with the citation of Hosea in Romans 9; and indeed all these truths appear to me to run together in the mind of the Spirit of God. If therefore we would understand the prophecy, we must follow and receive that which may seem discursively pursued in the New Testament, but which really was before the inspiring Spirit here too.

Consequently we have in the prophet what was true morally from the beginning of their sad history. It was now verging towards the bitter end of Israel, with Judah's ruin in full view. The very fact of prophets being raised up proved that the end was approaching; for prophecy only comes in with departure from God. There is no such form of revelation as prophecy when things run smooth and fair; nor is it then, morally speaking, required. What we have in days of comparative fidelity is the setting forth of privilege and duty; but when the privilege is despised and the duty not done, when God's people are in evident guilt, and judgment must follow, prophecy comes to tell of God's judging the evil, but with mercy and yet better blessing to the obedient remnant. This is true in principle even of the garden of Eden. God did not speak of the Seed of the woman till Adam was fallen; and so when Israel had transgressed like Adam, prophecy shines out. If the ruin were before Moses' eyes, as indeed it was, prophecy was vouchsafed to the lawgiver himself, as we see conspicuously in the end of Leviticus and Deuteronomy, not to speak of the wondrous burst through Balaam's mouth in the close of Numbers. Afterwards, when God had brought in every new form of blessing to kings raised up in grace to sustain the people, yet the ruin was only more decided. Prophecy too assumes a more comprehensive, systematic, and complete shape. A whole host of prophets, one might say, appears at this time; mighty prophetic utterances warned the people when outwardly things seemed strong but all was over before God, who therefore caused the alarm to be sounded with a remarkable and persistent urgency. The trumpet, as it were, was blown for Jehovah all over the land; and thus Hosea, as we know, was the contemporary of Amos, Micah, Isaiah, and perhaps other prophets at this time. There had been one even earlier still, as we may see if we compare the history. There was a peculiar reason for not putting the earliest first in order, which I hope to explain when I arrive at his book.

Already then the ruin was such that God's sovereignty was the only sure ground which could be taken. Hence we have seen that the apostle Paul uses this to point out, not merely the resource of grace for Israel, but that on Israel's failure it was perfectly open to God to go out to the Gentiles. For this is what Paul quotes the passage for in Rom. 9: "That he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy which he had afore prepared unto glory, even us whom he hath called, not of the Jews only." From the moment God falls back on His own sovereignty the ground is as open for a Gentile as for a Jew. God is not sovereign if He may not choose whom He pleases. If He is sovereign, then it is but natural that His sovereignty should display itself where it would be most conspicuous. The call of the Gentiles furnishes this occasion; for if they were worst, as they certainly were utterly degraded, for this very reason they were most fit objects for the exercise of the divine sovereignty in grace. "Even us whom he called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles. As he saith also in Osee, I will call them my people which were not my people, and her beloved which was not beloved. And it shall come to pass that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there shall they be called the children of the living God." It is evident that verse 25 the apostle interprets of the future call of Israel, the reinstatement of the people of God on a better footing than ever in sovereign grace; but he also applies verse 26 to the Gentiles.

Thus all is here set out in the most orderly method: "Even us whom he hath called, not of the Jews only" (shown in verse 25), "but also of the Gentiles" (referred to in verse 26). "And it shall come

to pass that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there shall they be called the sons of the living God." Consequently sonship is far more characteristic of the call of the Gentile than of the Jew. Thus in the change (not a little one, as I was going to say, but very great indeed), in the avoidance of the expression "people" and the employment of "sons," God with the most admirable propriety, intimates by His prophet that when He was going to work in grace He would work worthily of His name. He would bring Gentiles not merely into the place of Israel, but into a better standing. Granted that they were the vilest of the vile: even so grace could and would raise them into the nearest relationship to God Himself. Then they should be, not a mere substitute for Israel, but "the sons of the living God" — a title never given in its full force to any but the Gentiles who are now being called.

In a vague and general sense, as compared with distant Gentiles, Israel is called son, child, first-born; but this merely as a nation, whereas "sons" is individual. The expression, "In the place . . . Ye are the sons of the living God," in the latter part of verse 10, is what has been already spoken of as the dim allusion to the call of the Gentiles. but it is so dim that many persons swamp it all together, making it bear on Israel. It might have been viewed as referring to Israel if God had said, "Then they shall be Ammi." He does not, however, say this, but "sons of the living God."

Such is the point of the apostle Paul; and what confirms this as the true interpretation is, that Peter also quotes from our prophet, and indeed was writing to a remnant of Jews only, as the apostle Paul was writing in his own proper place to Gentiles. Peter, however, though he does quote Hosea, omits the words, "They shall be called the sons of the living God." See 1 Peter 2: 10: "Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy." For his object he quotes from Hosea 2, not from Hosea 1.

This strikingly falls in with what has been already observed, that the first chapter shows not merely the restoration of Israel (perfectly true as this is, and therefore in no way to be combated), but in a mysterious way room left by God for the bringing in of the Gentiles too. By the form of the allusion, which might very easily be overlooked, He proves His perfect knowledge beforehand, and makes a communication to us of the call of the Gentiles in their own proper distinctive relationship as sons of the living God, and not merely His people.

Hence it is that Peter, writing to Christian Jews only gives the latter. Although they had lost their place of people of God through idolatry — and certainly the rejection of the Messiah did not mend matters, but rather confirmed the righteous sentence of God, that the little remnant which had come back were as bad as their fathers, or even worse, for they certainly perpetrated a greater crime in the rejection of their own Messiah, — yet grace is come in, and they who have received the Messiah rejected but glorified, "are now the people of God." But he does not go farther, because he simply takes them up as persons who had by grace entered in faith into the privileges of Israel before Israel. They had received the Messiah; they were the remnant of that people. They who were not a people had become now a people; they who had not obtained mercy have now obtained mercy. But Paul, writing to the Gentiles, avails himself in a most appropriate way of what Peter passes by — not of Hosea 2: 23, but of Hosea 1: 10, which intimates the call of Gentiles in yet greater depth of mercy. At the same time he takes care to show that the Jew will require the very same ground of sovereign grace to bring him in by and by as we have for coming in now.

The prophet, it is well to observe, appears to point out Israel's future restoration immediately after in a slightly different phraseology, which I think ought to be noticed. "Then," he says (that is, when God has brought in the Gentiles, as we have seen), "Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together, and appoint themselves one head, and they shall come up out of the land."

Their restoration to the land is made evident here, their being joined — not only Judah, but even reprobate Ephraim — into Israel as a whole. "For great shall be the day of Jezreel." The very name of Jezreel, which was before a term of reproach and initiatory judgment, is now turned by the grace of God into a title of infinite mercy, when they shall be indeed the seed of God, not for scattering only but for the rich harvest of blessing that is to characterize the millennial day. Such is the first chapter.

Hosea 2 begins like the end of the first. In the rest of the chapter we have God carrying out a part but not the whole of the wonderful principles that are so compressed in the first chapter. We begin with the message: "Say ye unto your brethren, Ammi; and to your sisters, Ruhamah. Plead with your mother." It is a call to those who like Hosea could feel, speak, and act according to the Spirit of Christ, with the courage inspired by the certainty of such relationships, though for the present the state of the people was as far from comforting as could well be conceived, as indeed is plain from the next and following verses. "Brethren" and "sisters" look at the Jews (I think) individually. "Your mother" looks at them corporately as a body. "Plead: for she is not my wife, neither am I her husband: let her therefore put away her whoredoms out of her sight." Here then we behold a most painful picture — Jehovah threatening to put Israel to shame, and to have no mercy upon her children, because their mother had behaved shamelessly towards Himself. "For she is not my wife, nor am I her husband." She must put away her scandalous unfaithfulness, "lest I strip her naked, and set her as in the day when she was born, and make her as the desert, and cause her to die of thirst. On her children I will have no mercy; for they are lewd children, because their mother hath committed lewdness, their parent hath acted shamefully; for she said, I will follow my lovers, that give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my wine."

Accordingly Jehovah threatens to hedge up her way with thorns. "Therefore, behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and raise a wall, that she may not find her paths. And she shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them; and she shall seek them, but shall not find them: then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now." There was compunction occasionally, a little revival from time to time even in Israel; but the people never really repented or consequently abandoned their course of sin. Their good resolutions were the proof of God's goodness and the fruit of His testimony, but they never effected a thorough repentance of Israel. "For she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they made into images of gold." Thus all was perverted to the service, and it was imputed to the favour of false gods. "Therefore," says He, "I will take my corn in its time, and my new wine in its season; and I will recover my wool and my flax designed to cover her nakedness. And I will expose her vileness before her lovers, and none shall deliver her out of my hand." Then He threatens that all her mirth shall cease, "her feast days, her new moons, and her sabbaths, and all her solemn assemblies. And I will destroy her vines and her fig-trees." Even her natural blessings must be cut off which her unbelief made an excuse for the idols she set up. "And I will visit upon her the days of Baalim, wherein she burned incense to them." All her luxurious and idolatrous sins therefore would come up in remembrance for judgment.

Nevertheless Jehovah remembers mercy, and immediately after announces that He will allure her, and, though leading her into the wilderness, speak soothingly to her. But it should not be the past renewed, the old and sad history of Israel rehearsed once more; for to her He would grant her vineyards thence, the valley of Achor for a door of hope. The very place which of old was a door of judgment under Joshua becomes a door of hope in the prophetic vision. "And she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt." Nor shall this freshness of renewed youth fade away as then. "And it shall be at that day, saith Jehovah, that thou shalt call me

Ishi; and shalt call me no more Baali," (that is, "husband" in love instead of mere "lord," were it in the best and truest sense of dominion and possession from her mouth); also the many and false lords should no more be remembered by their names. "And in that day will I make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven, and with the creeping things of the ground: and I will break the bow and the sword."

Thus we see that, coincident with the return of Israel to Jehovah, and this flowing out of His grace towards them, there shall follow universal blessedness. God will make all the earth to feel to its own joy the gracious restoration of His long-estranged people. With the beasts of the field, and the fowls of heaven, and the reptiles of the earth, Jehovah declares He will make a covenant for them in that day. It is infatuation to think that all this was fully accomplished at the return from the Babylonish captivity. The result is that even Christians, misled by this miserable error, are drawn away into the rationalistic impiety of counting God's word here mere hyperbole to heighten the effect, as if the Holy Spirit deigned to be a verbal trickster or a prophet were as vain as a litterateur. No; it is a brighter day when the power of God will make a complete clearance from the world of disorder, misrule, man's violence and corruption, as well as reduce to harmless and happy subjection the animal kingdom at large.

On the other hand, it is not the epoch of the Incarnation, as some pious men say; though how they can venture on it is marvellous. "That day" is still future, and awaits the appearing and the kingdom of the Lord Jesus. It is distressing to confound such a prophecy with Peter's vision in order to apply all to the church now. "The bow and the sword and the battle I will break and remove out of the earth or land, and will make them to lie down safely." But, better than all, "I will also betroth thee to myself for ever;" for what is the worth of every other mercy compared with this nearest association with Jehovah Himself? "Yea, I will betroth thee to myself in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies," says He for the third time. "I will betroth thee to myself in faithfulness; and thou shalt know Jehovah."

Then comes a final and still fuller assurance. "And it shall come to pass in that day, I will hear, saith Jehovah, I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth; and the earth shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil; and they shall hear Jezreel." What an uninterrupted line of blessing, from the heavens down to every earthly blessing in the land of Israel! Every creature of God shall then reap in full enjoyment the fruits of the restored and consummated union of Jehovah with His ancient people. "And I will sow her unto me in the earth [referring to the name of Jezreel]; and I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy (or Lo-ruhamah); and I will say to them which were not my people (or Lo-ammi), My people thou; and they shall say, My God."

Alas! the heavens had been severed, necessarily and long severed, from the earth by the sin of man, and Satan had gained power not merely on the earth, but above could claim a seeming title of righteousness as accuser before God; and thus the heavens were turned into brass against His people, whom the same enemy so often deceived, perverting that which ought to have been the constant governing power and symbol of all, that influenced men in relation to God into his mainspring, of corruption. For instead of looking up to God in adoration, man adored the heavens and their host rather than God as the highest object of his worship. Such was the earliest form of idolatry. It was there that Satan's power particularly developed itself, in the turning of the highest creatures of God, the most significant parts and signs of His blessing to man, into instruments of the worst corruption. In that day Jehovah will show His power and goodness in destroying and reversing the work of Satan.

Instead therefore of longer hearing his accusation in the heavens who had only sought to

dishonour God and involve man in his own ruin, Jehovah will clear the heavens. There will be restored freedom between the Creator and the higher creation, which speaks to Him as it were on behalf of the thirsty earth, Satan being then expelled, and his power and corrupting influence broken, never more to enter there again. Then, as it is said here, "the heavens shall hear the earth, and the earth shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil." That is, instead of the old and complete breach between the creation and God, and consequently therefore, through the serpent's wiles, desolation justly inflicted by God because of its fallen head, Satan will be effectually gone and all the effects of his power effaced. For the Second man will establish peace on a righteous ground for ever between God and Israel, and all the creatures of God, from the highest down to the lowest, enter into rest and Joy.

Thus there is a total reversal of what Satan had done by sin throughout the universe, but especially in view of Israel; so that the names of the first chapter, which then betokened divine judgment, are now converted into mercy and blessing. "The earth [or land] shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil; and they shall hear Jezreel," as Israel is styled, the seed of God. Lo-ruhamah God calls Ruhamah; and to Lo-ammi He says, "Ammi thou." No doubt there is an allusion in Jezreel to their antecedent dispersion; in no way to anything Israel has been during their days of shame and sorrow, but rather to a fresh sowing of them in the land by Jehovah's grace to His glory. The proper fulfilment of this (whatever be the verification of its principle in the Christian remnant, as we see in 1 Peter 2) awaits the future and manifest kingdom of Jehovah and His Anointed. Then, not in pledge but in fulness, will it be seen by all the world that Hosea has not written in vain: "I will sow her unto me in the earth." It is granted that Jehovah intends to take all the earth under His manifest sway (Ps. 2, Zech. 14), but a great mistake that "the land" will not have a central place in this vast scheme of earthly blessing. The church will be the *New Jerusalem*, the heavenly metropolis, coming down from God out of heaven, to which she properly belongs as the bride of the Lamb. But the earth is to be blessed, and pre-eminently the land of Israel under Christ's glorious reign; for the divine purpose is to sum up all things in Him in whom we have obtained an inheritance — all things, whether they be things in heaven or things on earth. He, the Son in a way quite unique, is Heir of all in the truest and fullest sense, and the kingdom at His coming will display what faith believes while it is unseen.

Hosea 3 presents a still more concise summary of Israel's past, present, and future, yet with fresh and striking features in this new outline, brief as it is. Even such Jews as acknowledge their own prophets as divinely inspired confess that Hosea in verse 4 describes exactly their present state, as it has also been for many centuries: neither altar of God nor idolatry, no consultation by the true priests or by idols; though they flatter themselves that they still adhere to Jehovah notwithstanding their sins.* How blind to overlook the teaching that they are out of relation to Jehovah, and that it is only after the present long-lasting anomaly in their state that they are to seek their God!

{*Leeser's Twenty-four Books of the Holy Scriptures, page 1242. London edition.}

This chapter winds up, as has been stated, the introductory portion of our prophecy. Hosea is still occupied with the purposes of God. "Then said Jehovah unto me, Go yet, love a woman beloved of her friend, yet an adulteress." Again that most distressing contrast; the object of Jehovah's affection, and withal the base and gross return of Israel represented by Gomer, who had been unfaithful to the prophet, as was intimated before the marriage that she would be. The precision of the language, and the purity of God's servant even under so singular an injunction, are equally beautiful. She is called no longer thy wife but "a woman;" but her impurity was after marriage, and so she is justly named an adulteress. He is told to go again, and love her, a woman beloved by a "friend." Conjugal love is not intended; yet was she to be loved, as indeed she had been: there was no excuse for her sin in any failure of his affection. The exhortation was not after the manner of men, nor even of the law which regulated

Israel's ordinary ways. It was grace, and "according to the love of Jehovah toward the sons of Israel, who look to other gods, and love flagons [or cakes] of grapes." For the connection of cakes with idolatry, see Jer. 7: 18, Jer. 44: 19. The purchase-money, half in barley, half in money, is that of a female slave; which marks the degradation to which the guilty woman had been reduced; it was of course not a dowry, as she had been married to him already. "And I said unto her, Thou shalt abide [lit. sit] for me many days," said the prophet to her; "thou shalt not commit lewdness, and thou shalt not be to* a man [i.e. neither in sin nor in lawful married life]: so I also toward* thee" — his heart and care here, not "to her" as her husband, but "toward" her in affection as a friend. The bearing of this on Israel is next explained: "for the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without seraphim: afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek their God, and David their king; and shall fear Jehovah and his goodness in the latter days."

{*The authorised version by giving "for me" and for thee" seems slightly to injure the force by its vague sameness of rendering. }

Here are many important points which we could not have gathered from either the first chapter or the second. We have seen the general position down to the end in Hosea 1; we have had certain details about Israel in Hosea 2; but Hosea 3 furnishes the solemn evidence that the humiliation of Israel was to involve a most marked and peculiar isolation, and that it was not to be a passing visitation but a prolonged state, while grace would bless more than ever in the end. "For the sons of Israel shall abide many days." This could not have been concluded from the language of the preceding chapters. The picture therefore would not have been complete without it. Hence the Spirit of God, true to the divine purpose, gives us enough in these few words to meet the objections of him who might complain that Christianity supposes such an immense time as the period of Israel's blindness and departure from God. The answer is that the Jewish prophet says as much, and thereby the Lord leaves room for all that had to come in meanwhile. Not of course that "many days" would convey the thought of ages as the necessary meaning at first, but that as the time lengthened out, it would be seen that it had been all foreseen and predicted.

But there is more. For they are to remain "without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without a seraphim." Further, they were not to take up idolatrous statues or images, as they had so often done up to the captivity; and as they should be without an ephod, the distinctive priestly apparel, so they should not fall back on tutelary divinities as they used to do for anticipating the future. They should not have a king as before the captivity, nor a prince as the Jews had after their return from Babylon. Israel afterwards had neither; and even the Jews lost what they had not long after Christ came. Again, they were to be "without a sacrifice," their sacred as well as civil polity was at an end; for what is the law without a sacrifice? Thus it is a state of things far more true now since the rejection of the Messiah, than up to that transitional period when Messiah came to them; for, although they had not a king, they had a sort of princely ruler. Certainly in the days of the Lord there was under the authority of the Roman empire a subordinate king or ruler, who might be called prince in a certain sense. They were also to be not only without the worship of the true God, but even without the false gods to which they had formerly been victims. Clearly then this describes the present condition of Israel — the most anomalous spectacle the world has ever seen — a people who go on age after age without any of those elements which are supposed to be essential for keeping a people in existence. For they have lost their king and prince, they have neither God nor an idol. They are not able to present a sacrifice, having nobody that they know to be a priest. Partly since Babylon carried them into captivity, entirely since Titus destroyed Jerusalem, they are literally without those

genealogies which the priests must possess and produce in order to prove their title to minister in the holy place. Whatever their pretensions, they can prove nothing, and yet they are upheld by God.

Thus we have here in a single verse of our prophet the most complete picture of their present state found in the word of God — a picture which no Jew can deny to be a likeness of their actual state. The more honest they may be, the more they must acknowledge the living truth of the representation. Now, that God should have no connection with anything on the earth — that He should be effectuating no purpose in a distinct manner for His own glory — would be a monstrous notion, only fit for the wildest Epicurean dreamer, and a practical denial of the living God. Consequently, that God should use this time of the recess of Israel for the bringing in of other counsels is the simplest thing possible, which we can all understand. The Jew by and by will confess that he was inexcusably faithless in his ways and mistaken in his thoughts; he had here at least the negative side of the picture, his own enigmatic state, the people of God not His people, a nation without a government, and, stranger still, with no false god and yet without the true, having neither priest nor sacrifice. The Spirit of God gives the positive side in the New Testament, where we have the call of the Gentiles meanwhile, and within it the gathering of the faithful into the church — Christ's body.

But in addition to all, the last verse furnishes another most distinct disclosure, which none but prejudiced men could overlook, that God has not done with Israel as such. It is not true, therefore, that the sons of Israel are to be merged in Christianity. They are said (ver. 5) afterwards not to turn but to "return," and seek Jehovah their God. This is not a description of becoming members of Christ, or of receiving the new and deeper revelations of the New Testament. They will never as a nation form the heavenly body of Christ, either wholly or in part. They will be saved in God's grace through faith in the Lord Jesus, but rather according to the measure vouchsafed to their fathers than to us now, with the modification of the manifest reign of the Lord. Compare Isaiah 11, Luke 1, Romans 11. Individuals merge in Christianity now of course, and are brought out of their state of Judaism consequently; but here we have a different and future state of things quite distinct in some material respects from anything that was or from anything that is, though there be but one Saviour, and but one Spirit, and but one God the Father. "Afterwards shall the sons of Israel return and seek" — not the exalted Head in heaven nor the gospel as such, but — "Jehovah their God." I grant you it is the same God, yet as Jehovah. It is not the revelation of His name as the Messiah (when rejected, and above all dead and risen) made Him known as "His Father and our Father, His God and, our God." It is not the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit into which we are baptized with water. Here it is rather the form and measure vouchsafed to the nation of old. In short it is God made known after a Jewish sort. And what confirms this is the next expression, "and David their king" — that same blessed person, even the Messiah as such, who unites these two glories in His person, though the former of course not exclusively.

Evidently therefore a state of things is before us quite distinct from Christianity. The Targum and the Rabbinical expositors own that David here means the Messiah. "And they shall fear toward Jehovah, and toward His goodness in the latter day." Thus we have clearly in this passage, not only the present abnormal condition of Israel, but the future restoration of their blessedness, yea, more than they ever yet possessed.* If "the latter days" mean, according to the well-known rule of Kimchi and other Jewish doctors, the days of the Messiah, the New Testament demonstrates that the question has still to be decided between the days of His first advent or those of His second. The context proves that in the Old Testament these days always look on to His reign in power and glory; but various parts of it in the Psalms and the Prophets attest His profound humiliation and death as clearly as His reign over Israel and the earth. The Jews and the Gentiles are quite if not equally wrong for want of simple-hearted

intelligence without confusion of the New Testament with the Old.

{*Dr. Henderson renders the last clause, "shall tremblingly hasten to Jehovah and to his goodness." His goodness will attract but overawe their souls. It is real and pious feeling, but in accordance with their relationship — hardly with that of the Christian; and so the New Testament never speaks in exactly the same way. It is unwise and unfaithful to force the scriptures.}

The rest of the prophecy consists of the indignant appeals of the Holy Spirit to conscience because of the increasing evils of Israel — not so much the judgment of God on a grand scale, and His grace at the end, but His people caused to see themselves over and over again, and in every class, in presence of His patient but righteous ways with them. I do not mean that we shall not find here, especially at the end, what Jehovah will do in His goodness, but it consists much more of presentation sketches of Israel in a moral point of view. His dealings and denunciations compare the actual state then with the past, but the Spirit of prophecy launches into the future also. This, in fact, will be found in the rest of the prophecy, which closes with not a call only to repentance, but Jehovah's final assurance to Israel of His mercy, love, and rich blessing. Thus the two divisions end alike with Israel blessed inwardly and outwardly on earth to the praise of Jehovah their God, wound up with a moral appeal and a warning at the conclusion of all (Hosea 14: 9).

In this second or remaining part the opening chapter (Hosea 4) begins to set out the ground of complaint against the sons of Israel. They are called to hear Jehovah; for He "hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land." It is well to note this. In the hypocrite or the theorist there may be a certain knowledge without good fruit; but, in those who are simple and real, knowledge of God cannot be separated from holy and righteous ways, as practical evil goes with ignorance of God. As the first verse puts their state negatively, in the second we have the positive wickedness charged home with amazing energy: "Swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, burst out, and blood [lit. bloods] toucheth on blood." There was to the prophet nothing else. Profanity against God, corruption and violence among men, filled the scene; and this in the land where Jehovah's eyes rested continually, whence He had destroyed the former inhabitants because of their iniquities. "Therefore shall the land mourn, and every one that dwelleth therein shall languish, with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven; yea, the fishes of the sea also shall be taken away." God marked His sense of all by desolation in the lower creation, down to those which might seem farthest from the control or influence of man. Such was the havoc and misery under God's hand through Israel's sin. "Yet let not man strive, and let not man reprove; for thy people [are] as they that strive with the priest." It was vain for man to speak now: God must take in hand a people who were like such as rejected him who spoke and judged in His name. Therefore was their destruction imminent, and would it be unceasing, "thou" and "the prophet" and "thy mother" — all, root and branch. "Therefore shalt thou fall in the day, and the prophet also shall fall with thee in the night, and I will destroy thy mother."

"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I also will reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: because thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I too will forget thy children" (ver. 6). The true meaning seems to be Israel's loss of their relative nearness to God as His people (Ex. 19), not to such sons of Aaron as might pander to irregularities in worship or connive at sin. Not individuals but "my people" are in question; as those who bring priests into the verse seem to see in the following clause. We shall hear of priests presently. Here it is the people. "As they increased, so they sinned against me: I will change their glory into shame. They eat up the-sin [perhaps sin-offering] of my people, and long after [lift up their soul to] their iniquity. Therefore it shall be, like people, like priest; I will visit upon him his ways, and make his doings to return to him." Here

imperceptibly we come from the people to the priest, who are singularly identified, as in wickedness so in punishment, in the latter clauses of verse 9 — not "them" but "him." They were alike evil. No class was exempt from pollution: people and priests were indiscriminately corrupt. From their position the priests might be more guilty than the people; but they were all morally at one. But God would not fail in judgment.

"For they shall eat, and not have enough: they shall commit lewdness, and shall not increase: because they have left off to take heed to Jehovah. My people ask counsel at their stocks, and their staff declareth unto them: for the spirit of lewdness hath caused them to err, and they have gone lewdly from under their God." Thus moral laxity and indulgence play into the hands of idolatry, as Satan takes advantage of the passions to hold men in his religious toils. Hence we see how well the expression for uncleanness morally suits the heart's going after false gods. "They sacrifice on the tops of the mountains, and offer incense on the hills, under the oak and the poplar and the terebinth, because their shade is good: therefore your daughters commit lewdness, and your daughters-in-law commit adultery. I will not punish your daughters when they commit lewdness, nor your daughters-in-law when they commit adultery; for they themselves go aside with harlots, and sacrifice with prostitutes" (literally, consecrated to this demoralising false worship, which made their debasement a religious duty and a gain): "therefore the people not understanding shall be cast headlong."

Whatever their faults and ways against each other, deepest of all was their sin against Jehovah their God. And this furnishes the opportunity and necessity for the warning that they must lose their priestly character as a nation; that is, their distinctive nearness in relation to God. Further, let their ruin be a call to Judah to beware. This brings us face to face into the actual state of Israel when Hosea was on the earth. "Though thou, Israel, play the harlot, yet let not Judah offend; and come not ye unto Gilgal, neither go ye up to Beth-aven." The allusion is to the notorious idolatry of Israel and its chief seats, where God had once given the nation to judge their own evil, or near the spot where their father, prince with God, received promises of grace from Himself. It was now, however, not Bethel (house of God) but the neighbouring pollution, Beth-aven (house of vanity). "Nor swear, Jehovah liveth," thus adding insult against Jehovah to the injury done towards His truth; for idolatry is in no way mitigated, but the less excusable in him who even outwardly owns His name. This very recognition, and the attempt to mingle Jehovah with what was contrary to Jehovah, form the gravamen of their guilt, and its exact measure and worst aggravation at that epoch in the sight of God. The same principle applies now. To accredit with faith an offender is no ground whatever to count his sin less but rather more heinous. For there cannot be a more immoral or destructive principle than to allege the fact or hope of one's Christianity as a reason for slurring over his sin: on the contrary moral judgment and separation would be but due to the name of God, not to say in love to his soul whose deliverance and restoration we desire. For we have to do with God's will and ways; according to which a man's faith and confession of the Lord's name should be the ground of discipline, never of tolerating his sin. But latitudinarian laxity characterises these days, and is, under the show of grace, real evil in God's sight.

Take notice of another solemn principle in verse 17 after warning Judah from the sad ruin of Israel: a desolate land of exile was before them. "Ephraim is joined to idols [lit. toils]: let him alone." God chastises as long as there is the smallest feeling; but when He ceases to deal with the guilty, all is over morally speaking. When to Ephraim or any other He gives such rest as this, it is because hope is abandoned, and the evil is allowed to run its course unchecked. "Their drink is turned; her rulers greatly love infamy:" that is, they give themselves to nothing else than that which is and brings inevitable shame. "The wind hath bound her up in its wings, and they shall be ashamed of their sacrifice." They refused to learn of God in peace and righteousness, and must be given up to the winds, dispersed afar

off by their enemies, and there be humbled seeing they refused it in their own land.

There is a triple summons in Hosea 5: 1. We begin with a distinct address to the priests, then a call to the people, and lastly to the house of the king. The last chapter was occupied with the people, and only by gradual transition came to the priests. But now the leaders are appealed to, religious and civil.

There is a notion that Hosea is disorderly, some going so far as to say that there is no regular method in the book. One can understand men owning that they have failed to comprehend a prophet so concise and so rapid in his changes. But it is grievous to add that a bishop who was considered to possess learning ventured to pronounce it merely the leaves of the Sibyl; as if any inspired words could with reverence be compared to mythic oracles of no heavenly birth, written on leaves and dispersed by the wind. When will men learn modesty as to themselves as well as reverence when they have to do with the word of God? If they cannot explain a passage or a book, why not confess their ignorance or hold their peace? For a man professing to be a chief shepherd of Christ to dare thus to speak of writings beyond his own measure evinces certainly anything but the lowly faithfulness which becomes a steward of God. Such, however, is the spirit of man increasingly in this age. To my conviction, though with abundant ground for feeling my own shortcomings, the prophecy is beyond doubt knit together so as to indicate a systematic chain, profoundly dealing with the whole people, and pointing the moral for Judah from apostate and callous Ephraim.

Idolatrous evil, with every other in its train, had perverted all grades and men in Israel up to the priests and the king's household — the one controlling religious matters, the other acting as the fountain of authority here below. Where now was the saint of Jehovah, or the witness of the true David that was coming? Reckless impiety and self-indulgence reigned. There was wickedness everywhere. The judgment was now towards those who should have judged righteously. Alas! they were a snare on Mizpah and a net spread on Tabor. East or west of the Jordan made no difference; and the scenes of former mercies which ought never to have been forgotten were remembered but to give effect to actual enticements of idolatry. And the revolters made the slaughter deep, though Jehovah had been a rebuke to them all. Little as the guilty people thought it in their headlong self-willed madness, He well knew Ephraim, and Israel was not hidden from Him: defiling corruption wrought everywhere. Their doings would not permit them to return to their God; for the spirit of lewdness was in their bosom, and they had not known Jehovah. Therefore should the pride of Israel be humbled before His face; and Israel and Ephraim should stumble in their iniquity, Judah too falling with them (verses 1-5).

"They shall go with their flocks and with their herds to seek Jehovah; but they shall not find him; he hath withdrawn himself from them. They have dealt treacherously against Jehovah: for they have begotten strange children: now shall a month devour them with their portions." No offerings in such a state would avail: God stood aloof. Their treachery against Him was extreme; and the evil was perpetuated: but now, says the prophet in warning of speedy and sweeping judgments, shall one month devour them together with their portions [possessions]. Hence, says the prophet (verses 8, 9): "Blow ye the cornet in Gibeah, and the trumpet in Ramah: cry aloud at Beth-aven after thee, O Benjamin. Ephraim shall be desolate in the day of rebuke: among the tribes of Israel have I made known that which shall surely be."

Alas! Judah, instead of repenting, sought their own profit; and divine wrath must be poured on them. Ephraim, disobedient to God, was subservient enough to him who made Israel sin against God, who thereon is like a moth to him, and to Judah like rottenness. Chastening did not lead them to God, but to the Assyrian: could he heal or cure? It was bad enough to be treacherous to God; but it was

worse that they must expose their impiety and unbelief by having recourse to the stranger. It is a distress when the children of God behave ill among themselves, but it is an awful thing when there is no shame in seeking the resources of the world that hates them. With Israel this was the case. They exposed themselves; they exposed God, so to speak, in His own people, the only link, we may say, with God on the earth. "When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah saw his wound, then went Ephraim to the Assyrian, and sent to king Jareb:* yet could he not heal you, nor cure you of your wound." In fact it was God who was inflicting it: no wonder it was incurable. "For I will be unto Ephraim as a lion, and as a young lion to the house of Judah." Thus, we see, they are both now joined, as in sin so in punishment, first slow decay, and then fierce violence. Judah would take no warning from the sin of Ephraim or from his judgment now at hand. Hence says Jehovah, "I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early."

{*There seems no good reason to regard *ja'-reb* as a proper name, but rather as an ordinary appellation, meaning the king "that should contend," "plead," or "avenge" the hostile king: so many ancients and moderns. It was the Assyrian.}

This draws out a remarkable appeal from the agonized prophet (Hosea 6: 1): "Come, and let us return unto Jehovah; for he hath torn, and he will heal us." Is there any disorder here? What more proper? We have had the proof of the guilt of them all; not only the solemn warning of the Lord, but the distinct statement that He was going away from them to leave them to themselves — not absolutely as if He had done with them, though they had done with Him for the time; for He says, "In their affliction they will seek me early." There He gives them up. But this draws out the prophet. If such was the divine character, if God felt so keenly their adultery and spiritual treachery towards Himself, it nevertheless showed that His heart was towards them. "Come, and let us return." Why wait? Why go to the end of wickedness? "Come, and let us return unto Jehovah: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up," and with how much delight! It was God's hand that had brought them low, but He was able to heal. "After two days" — a sufficient witness, it would seem — "After two days he will revive us: in the third day" — the witness was now complete; for "in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established" — "in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight." He first gives enough proof of what we are; then He will prove what He is in raising His people up nationally as from the dead.

Can it be doubted that the passage does in an indirect and hidden but real way refer to the resurrection of Christ? He became the true Israel. Consequently, just as He went down in grace and perfectness into the depths where they had fallen justly for their sins, under the persecuting power of the Gentiles, and was called out of Egypt, as they had been of old (a scripture which is given later in Hosea and applied by the Spirit of God in Matthew 2), so I do not doubt here similarly we have the resurrection of the Lord in mysterious view. Nevertheless its plain and immediate bearing is rather on Israel than on the Messiah. To Him it only refers, inasmuch as the Holy Ghost cannot but bring Him everywhere in the Bible. No matter what He may treat of — if it be only loops or taches, badgers' or rams' skins, pillars, curtains, or anything else, revelation must always turn on Christ. His name lies at the bottom and is the top-stone of all. So it is here. Whatever the Spirit may hold out to Israel, Christ is the One fixed and guiding star to which we are directed by the Spirit of God. The chosen people may wax, wane, or disappear; but He abides, occasionally behind clouds the Sun that never sets. The Spirit is come to glorify Christ; He is now sent down, takes of the things of Christ, and shows them unto us. Even in the Old Testament, when coverings and a vail hung over all that was within, His words might be given, as remarked, in a kindred style: still Christ was ever underneath the veil.

Next we have from verse 4 Jehovah's grief, to which Hosea gives expression: "O Ephraim, what

shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away. Therefore have I hewed them by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of my mouth: and their judgments are as the light that goeth forth. For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. But they like men have transgressed the covenant; there have they dealt treacherously against me." It is the language of Jehovah, as the earlier verses were the prophet's exhortation. Thence he slides so to speak, into the language of Him who gave him his office. A prophet was really the voice of Jehovah, and therefore beginning as a prophet he rises up to that which becomes Jehovah Himself. The hewing of the people by the prophets expresses vividly the moral dealings of God which gave the wicked no quarter. "I have slain them by the words of my mouth," he adds, to make still plainer what kind of slaying it was. "And thy judgments are as the light that goeth forth."

But of mercy He speaks. "For I desired mercy:" this is what He loves, and to this end, that He may be morally vindicated in displaying it. "For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. But they like" — not "men" but — Adam is right. "*Men*" hardly gives the full force; in fact it is a force contrary to the truth, because men as such were not under the law nor under His covenant, and Adam did not hold such a place. As the head of the race, his position was well defined and peculiar. Adam had a relationship with God; but the fall broke up the state of innocence, and God "drove out the man," instead of keeping him in the earthly garden of His delights. The position of man since is that of an outcast from paradise. But Israel were called externally to a place of favour, separate to Jehovah from all the rest of mankind. There was a new trial of man, though of man fallen. Indeed this forms the proper scene of man's probation: either when in Eden, and there Adam comes before us; or out of Eden, and in due time the Jew manifests his course and issue. The interval between Adam and Israel, though not without divine testimonies and dealings in grace of the deepest interest individually, not to speak of the judgment of the world by the flood, was not one of recognised relationship with man as such, because, being driven out from the presence of God, he had as yet no formal position with God, save the responsibility of avenging His injured image. (Gen. 9: 5, 6.)

Consequently, although in the intervening time there were most instructive lessons, and of the greatest importance for us to heed, nevertheless Israel have a peculiar place, as under probation, that was found in no way between the two. Hence there need not be the slightest doubt that, although the word is capable of meaning "men" as well as "Adam," the context proves the true meaning to be what is given in the margin, not in the text: "But they [that is Israel], like Adam, have transgressed the covenant." Scripture never so speaks of man in general. Man is called a *sinner*. The Gentiles as such are not, I think, called *transgressors*. We hear of "sinners," never "transgressors, of the Gentiles." Men generally were not in a position to transgress; but they certainly were sinners and did nothing but sin. Transgression, dreadful as it is, supposes that those guilty of it have had a known revelation of God's revealed mind and will, and hence stand on a definite ground of relationship, the limits of which they have overpassed. Hence it is that "transgression" suits the state of man not when outcast, but when they break through the bounds that God has been pleased to set them. Certainly Adam was under a law, which he broke; he thus became a transgressor. Israel were under *the* law, which they broke likewise, and thus became transgressors. But the people between Adam and Moses, although they were sinners just as much as either, were not transgressors as both were.

This appears to be the ground taken here. Therefore the passage does not, I am persuaded, mean men, but Adam. "But they like Adam have transgressed the covenant." The relation of Adam with God may be regarded as a covenant with God, though not *the* covenant. There was certainly a law given to

Adam, but not *the* law. Israel had the law and the first or old covenant, in contrast with that new one of which Jeremiah speaks under the Messiah's reign of peace and glory. But Israel rebelled, or, as it is said here, "transgressed the covenant." "There have they dealt treacherously against me."

The region of Gilead, which was across the Jordan, is next specified. No city of the name is known: if none, the name is given by a bold figure to their corporate union in corruption and violence. "Gilead is a city of them that work iniquity, and is polluted with blood." Nor is this the worst: for the priests banded privily to waylay and destroy "And as troops of robbers wait for a man, so the company of priests murder in the way by consent." Those that ought to have been a city of refuge and active intercessors for the needy were themselves the ringleaders in evil, and on every ground the most guilty of all. They "murder in the way of consent (or "toward Shechem"): for they commit deliberate crime." This was the heart-breaking sorrow. Had it been among the heathen, it were not so surprising. But "I have seen a horrible thing in the house of Israel: there is the whoredom of Ephraim, Israel is defiled." The chapter closes with the assurance of sovereign mercy on His part who must judge iniquity according to the holiness of His nature. "Also, O Judah, he hath set an harvest for thee, when I returned [or rather return] the captivity of my people." It is impossible fairly to apply this to the return from the captivity in Babylon; for it is striking to observe that the post-captivity prophets never speak of the Jews who returned as "my people," save in predictions of future blessedness under their Messiah reigning in glory and power over the earth. The return of the Jews by the decree of Cyrus was an unparalleled event, contrary to the policy of the East, and only to be accounted for by, the power which wrought in the conscience of Babylon's conqueror through the divine word, and (it may be) the personal weight of Daniel. Put those who returned were never called "my people." It awaits another and very different day when the Jews shall look on Him whom they pierced. Compare chapters 1, 2, 3. For that day awaits the real fulfilment of Ps. 126: 1, 5, when the harvest of joy shall come after many and long sorrows.

Hosea 7, in a most solemn description, follows up the same proof and reproof of sin against them all; and shows that, spite of the patient mercy and touching appeals of God, they would only get worse and worse. The day of deliverance was as yet far off. God's intervention in goodness only manifested the people's sin "When I would have healed Israel, then the iniquity of Ephraim was discovered, and the evils of Samaria; for they practise falsehood (cf. John 3); and the thief cometh in, a troop of robbers plundereth without. And they say not to their hearts, I remember all their wickedness: now their own doings encompass them; they are before my face. They have made the king glad with their wickedness, and the princes with their lies."

What can be more graphic, though somewhat obscure from the singular compression of the style and rapid changes in figure, than the description which follows in verses 4-7, where the heart burns with the fire of passion, and indulgence and flattery furnish fuel? "They are all adulterers, as an oven heated by the baker, who ceaseth from raising after he hath kneaded the dough, until it be leavened. In the day of our king the princes have made him sick with bottles of wine; he stretched out his hand with scorners. For they have made ready their heart like an oven, whiles they lie in wait: their baker sleepeth all the night; in the morning it burneth as a flaming fire. They are all hot as an oven, and have devoured their judges; all their kings are fallen: there is none among them that calleth unto me." Ephraim is shown to have been mixed up among the nations to the dishonour of Jehovah. There might have been some hope, if he had judged such a self-willed slight and confusion and had repented; but he is become "a cake not turned" (verse 8). Therefore, it is only a question of getting so burnt as to be good for nothing. "Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not: yea, grey hairs are sprinkled about on him, and he knoweth it not" (verse 9). It was plain enough their heathen idols were proving

their ruin. "And the pride of Israel testifieth to his face; but they turn not to Jehovah their God, nor seek him for all this." This is confirmed in verse 11 by the proof of their folly. The grey hairs beginning to show themselves here and there held out no promise of a crown of honour for his head — far from it. They were but the sign of death working decrepitude, and of distance from God. Hence it is said: "Ephraim also is like a silly dove without heart: they call to Egypt, they go to Assyria." That is, they look anywhere and everywhere rather than to God. Jehovah had dealt with them, no doubt, punishing them in His retributive righteousness.

Hence it is said, "As they go, I will spread my net upon them; I will bring them down as the fowls of the heaven; I will chastise them, as their congregation hath heard. Woe unto them! for they have fled from me: destruction unto them! because they have transgressed against me: though I have redeemed them, yet they have spoken lies against me. And they have not cried unto me with their heart, when they howled upon their beds: they assemble themselves for corn and wine, and they rebel against me. Though I have bound and strengthened their arms, yet do they imagine mischief against me. They return, but not to the most High: they are like a deceitful bow: their princes shall fall by the sword for the rage of their tongue: this shall be their derision in the land of Egypt." Egypt, to which they called in vain, not only fails them, as against Assyria, but mocks at their captivity and ruin. Such is the world against God's guilty people. Whatever favours God gave them, they turned against Him; whatever judgments He sent against them, they never cried to Him. How dreadful was their condition when justly given up to their folly and its punishment! "They have not cried unto me," He says, "from their heart." They cried out when punished, but they never cried to God with their heart when they howled from their beds. Judgment had no more moral effect upon them than mercy.

In Hosea 8 accordingly, Jehovah warns aloud of unsparing judgment. "Set the trumpet to thy mouth. He shall come as an eagle against the house of Jehovah." They are the same figures used by our Lord in Matt. 24, where the disciples are told of the loud sound of the trumpet and of the eagles gathering together at the end of this age. The trumpet is clearly the announcement of the purpose of God in any given case. Here it is the sound of imminent judgment, as in the Lord's later prophecies it assures of the time come to gather the scattered Jews, or rather Israel. The eagles are a figure of the instruments of divine vengeance surely and rapidly coming to their prey. I only refer to both now to illustrate the surprising unity of scripture, and show how the employment of figures from beginning to end is governed by the perfect wisdom of God. This is no inconsiderable help to interpretation; because if the prophets had only employed each his own peculiar phrases, it would have been incomparably more difficult to understand scripture. As it is, there is a definite language of symbol used right through the Bible; and when you have seized it in one place, it remains for use in another, and thus become a means of helping us through what would otherwise prove more difficult. But it is well to remember that in point of depth the New Testament exceeds the Old; and although many complain of difficulties in Hebrew, they are not of the same nature but are mainly owing to a difference of relationship.

"To me will they then cry, My God, we [Israel] know thee." It was but lip-confession. "Israel hath cast off good; the enemy shall pursue him. They have set up kings, but not by me: they have made princes and I knew it not: of their silver and their gold have they made them idols that they may be cast off. Thy calf, O Samaria, hath cast thee off; mine anger is kindled against them: how long will it be ere they attain to purity? For from Israel was it also: the workman made it; therefore it is not God: but the calf of Samaria shall be broken in pieces. For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind: it hath no stalk: the bud shall yield no meal: if so be it yield, the strangers shall swallow it up. Israel is swallowed up: now shall they be among the Gentiles as a vessel wherein is no pleasure."

The prophet in spirit sees the people already captives, yet not extinguished, among the Gentiles,

yet never coalescing as others, utterly despised as none ever were, yet surviving all cruelty and shame to this day. "For they are gone up to Assyria, a wild ass alone by himself: Ephraim hath hired lovers. Yea, because they hire among the nations, now will I gather them, and in a little they shall sorrow for the burden of the king of princes." This was one great offence with God, whom they forsook and forget: else surely He had appeared for their deliverance as He did for Judah. They sought the shelter of Assyria, and there should they be carried in shame. "Because Ephraim hath made many altars to sin, many altars shall be unto him to sin." This was their other great transgression, the parent of fruitful evil and sorrow. "I have written to him the great things of my law: they were counted as a strange thing. They sacrifice flesh for the sacrifices of mine offerings, and eat it: Jehovah accepteth them not; now will he remember their iniquity, and visit their sins: they shall return to Egypt. For Israel hath forgotten his Maker, and buildeth temples; and Judah hath multiplied fenced cities; but I will send a fire upon his cities, and it shall devour the palaces thereof." There might be thus a difference in degree of departure. Israel had abandoned the true God, Judah trusted her fortified cities; but judgment would prove that God is not indifferent in either case to His own dishonour. The denunciation here is too plain to call for explanation.

Hosea 9 sets out the joyless doom of Israel for their lewd departure from their God; for they had taken their corn as a harlot's hire from their false gods: all such outward mercies should fail, and they should not dwell in the land of Jehovah, but Ephraim shall return to Egypt, and in Assyria they should eat of unclean things — some fleeing voluntarily to the former, the mass captives in the latter. They should not pour out wine to Jehovah, nor should they be pleasing to Him — their sacrifices unto them as the bread of mourners; all that eat thereof should be unclean; for their bread should be for themselves — none should come into the house of Jehovah (verses 1-4). "What will ye do on the day of assembly — on the day of Jehovah's feast?" They should be not only incapable of keeping holiday after the manner prescribed, but alas! without the heart and conscience exercised, seeing man's power, not their own sin nor God's judgment. "For, lo, they are gone because of destruction." To avoid the Assyrian they escaped to the south; but "Egypt shall gather them, Memphis shall bury them [not the land of their fathers]; as for their desired silver, nettles shall inherit it — thorns in their tents." Impatience had long stupefied them. They should awake to suffering if not repentance. "The days of visitation are come, the days of retribution are come; Israel shall know it [not yet themselves, nor Jehovah]. The prophet is foolish, the man of the spirit frantic, for the greatness of thy punishment and the great hatred." Such had been Israel's taunt against the true prophet; and such was meted again to the false. Of these deceivers it was true. "Ephraim [was a] watchman with my God; the prophet is a fowler's snare on all his ways — hatred in the house of his God. They have gone deep, they are corrupted, as in the days of Gibeah: he will remember their iniquity, he will visit their sins" (ver. 5-9).

As the Spirit compares their state as a whole to that frightful epoch when one tribe all but perished for its obstinate espousal of an evil most offensive to Israel, so now He dwells on Jehovah's love for the people and their sad return. "I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your fathers as the first-ripe in the fig-tree at her first time: but they went to Baal-peor, and separated themselves unto that shame; and their abominations were according as they loved. As for Ephraim, their glory shall fly away as a bird, from the birth, and from the womb, and from the conception. Though they bring up their children, yet will I bereave them, that there shall not be a man left; yea, woe also to them when I depart from them! Ephraim, as I saw Tyrus, is planted in a pleasant place: but Ephraim shall bring forth his children to the murderer. Give them, O Jehovah: what wilt thou give? give them a miscarrying womb and dry breasts. All their wickedness is in Gilgal: for there I hated them: for the wickedness of their doings I will drive them out of mine house, I will love them no more: all their princes are revolvers. Ephraim is smitten' their root is dried up, they shall bear no fruit: yea, though they bring

forth, yet will I slay even the beloved fruit of their womb. My God will cast them away, because they did not hearken unto him: and they shall be wanderers among the nations."

Thus not only should a blight fall on their national prosperity, and their glory in their children perish, but woe to themselves forsaken of Jehovah! Murder and barrenness should befall Ephraim, who dared to make Gilgal itself the sink of their wickedness: for their wicked audacious doings Jehovah would drive them out of His house, and love them no more; but they should not wander only, but be wanderers among the nations. How truly accomplished to the letter! and the more strikingly because they do not form a separate community, but mix with the Gentiles within and without Christendom, chiefly abandoned to the lust of gain.

In Hosea 10 we have Israel judged as an empty* vine in accordance with all that precedes. For it is clear that this answers to the outward state in the days of the prophet. There was ample religious show, such as it was — profession, but nothing for God's acceptance — the plain contrast of Christ, who alone was the true vine. This is another instance of the way in which Christ takes up in His own person the history of Israel, and renews it for good in obedience to God's glory; as all the fruit Israel brought forth was to lusts, multiplying altars as his fruit multiplied, and making goodly statues or images as his land was made good. It is always thus where prosperity accompanies an unrenewed mind. "Their heart is divided; now shall they be guilty. He will cut off their altars; he will spoil their statues [or images]. For now will they say, We have no king, because we fear not Jehovah and the king: what can he do for us? They have spoken [mere] words, swearing falsely, making a covenant, and judgment springeth up as hemlock in the furrows of the field." It was poison they planted, cultivated, and would reap. "For the calves of Beth-aven the inhabitants of Samaria fear; yea, the people thereof mourn over them, and the priests thereof [that] rejoiced over them for its glory, because it is departed from it. This also shall be carried to Assyria a present to the contentious king [or king Jareb]: Ephraim shall receive shame, and Israel be ashamed of his own counsel." Their idol, far from helping, was taken captive with the besotted people who gave up Jehovah for the likeness of a calf which eats hay. "As for Samaria, her king is cut off as foam [or a chip] on the face of the water. The high places of Aven, the sin of Israel, shall be destroyed: the thorn and the thistle shall come up on their altars; and they shall say to the mountains, Cover us; and to the hills, Fall on us."

{*Dr. Henderson and others render *baqaq* "luxuriant," and argue that the idea of emptying, which the verb also has (derived) from that of *pouring out entirely or abundantly* the contents of a vessel, does not suit the present connection. But there is no need for the smallest violence. For inasmuch as the sense is clearly a vine that is luxuriant in everything but fruit, pouring out, as it literally means, its wood and leaves, the authorized version is justified, not those who overlook the connection, and take it in the sense of fruitfulness. The Targum of Jonathan is decidedly in favour of this; the old versions are divided, like the moderns.}

Verses 9-11 are a most animated appeal, putting Israel now in as bad or a worse light than guilty Benjamin when all the other tribes punished his iniquity. "O Israel, thou hast sinned from the days of Gibeah: *there they stood*." They were fallen now; and that battle or worse must now overtake them. The nations will be used of Jehovah to chastise Israel, only harmonious and earnest in toiling at sin. Whatever might have been the gentle training of God before, He would place a rider on Ephraim [not make Ephraim to ride], but Judah, yea, all the seed of Jacob, should be broken down under the hand of the enemy. Under kindred figures an exhortation follows in verse 12, and a reproof in 13; but internal tumult would surely come, and ruin from without ensue, on Shalman (=Shalmaneser's) in the day of battle; and all this destructive devastation Bethel should procure them for "the wickedness of their wickedness:" "in a morning shall the king of Israel utterly be cut off."

Hosea 11 exemplifies a remark made repeatedly; for here again the Spirit intermingles Christ and Israel very strikingly. "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt." The allusion is clear to the past history of Israel, when they were the object of Jehovah's love and delivering power and special government. There seems an intimation of what He may do for His people by and by; for great things are in store for that people preserved providentially now for the work of grace at the end of this age. Meanwhile the Lord Jesus comes in between the two, enacting as it were the history over again in His own person, and becoming the basis for the future restoration of Israel. It is here that the principle applies so admirably. He resumes in grace their leading points, and thus comforts faith in Israel by the testimony of God's care for His people. "[He] then called them, so they went from them: they sacrificed unto Baalim, and burned incense to graven images. I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms; but they knew not that I healed them. I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love: and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid meat unto them." Thus, spite of all His goodness in every suited form, He was in their eyes as those that put the yoke on the Jews, feed them as He might.

At the same time Egypt is not, strictly speaking, the place where the great bulk of them lie hidden, though those who maybe there will surely be called out. Thus was Christ when His parents fled of old from Herod. But as a whole the tribes were carried into Assyria; and Hosea says here, "He shall not return into the land of Egypt: but the Assyrian shall be his king, because they refused to return." The meaning implied is that in rebellion against God some would have liked Egypt as a refuge from the Assyrian spoiler. We know that in the time of Jeremiah there was such a resource in order to avoid submission to Babylon. God commanded the king and people to submit to the head of gold; but they would not, keeping by Egypt, which was tolerably near for escape. In vain! they perished; and Egypt was humbled under His hand. It was not that Israel had reason to love the iron furnace whence they had come out, — their house of bondage till God delivered them by Moses; but man is ever perverse; and even Egypt, when displeasing to God and about to be judged after Israel, seems to their blind unbelief a desirable shield from the sword of the Assyrian when it comes, as it surely will. What we fly from in opposition to God's will becomes our severest scourge. "He shall not return into the land of Egypt, but the Assyrian shall be his king, because they refused to return. And the sword shall abide on his cities, and shall consume his branches, and devour them, because of their own counsels. And my people are bent to backsliding from me: though they called them to the most High, none at all would exalt him." The prophet's language is picturesque, though compressed. The supposed Sibylline irregularity is nowhere in Hosea. There is often difficulty, because we are ignorant, and it may be added, because we do not read with the feeling and on the ground of Jews; for this prophet is intensely Jewish. The time is not yet come when Israel will be awakened to appreciate his rapid transitions, his solemn reproaches, his mingled recalls of divine favour. When that time comes, all difficulties of this kind will disappear. The Israelite will delight in and sympathize with these impassioned changes. Gentiles are but little capable of entering into such experience, and more particularly too when they confound, as they generally do, what belongs to Israel with the Christian's portion.

Here then, just as before, the announcement of these sweeping judgments of Jehovah, as well as of their humiliating causes, is pressed on the conscience and heart of Israel; at one time they are inflicted morally by the prophet, at another they are from their foes. Of course moral judgment comes first. Now we have it in a more external form. Their punishment is threatened to the last extremity out of the land, slaves of the heathen, which they assumed never could be; for so superstition dreams, as once in Israel, no less in what calls itself the church. But it is most just and retributive punishment. Nevertheless we have a new burst of sorrow on God's part, who grieved though compelled to strike, and would not utterly destroy the people He had chosen. "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall

I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not man; the Holy One in the midst of thee: and I will not enter into the city. They shall walk after Jehovah: he shall roar like a lion: when he shall roar, then the children shall tremble from the west. They shall tremble as a bird out of Egypt, and as a dove out of the land of Assyria: and I will place them in their houses, saith Jehovah. Ephraim compasseth me about with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit: but Judah yet ruleth with God, and is faithful with the saints."

Were they not really as bad as the devoted cities of the plain? Yet would He spare in sovereign mercy, not like man returning to complete the work, nor entering into the city that He might do it thoroughly; for He is God and not man, the Holy One in the midst of Ephraim. Here He assures not only of His intervention, but of their submission and answer to His summons, from the west, south, and north-east; for the Assyrians represent the north as decidedly as the east. The last verse however judges the present moral state of the two houses of Israel. How far from what grace will yet work though Judah stood?

Accordingly Hosea 12 pursues the reproof of Ephraim, and charges Judah also with offences in His sight. Thus Jacob is brought in not only as guilty in his sons, but personally as an object of divine dealing in order to counsel the people now. And a most interesting appeal it is, where Jehovah now pleads with His people, not so much appealing to conscience, nor letting them know His own pain in smiting them, but urging on them the reminiscences of past mercy to their father Jacob as a present lesson to his sons. How many a soul has been brought back to God by reminding it of joys once tasted, though long, long forgotten! And Jehovah will use any and every right measure to win His people back to Himself. So here He reminds them of Jacob. "Ephraim feedeth on wind" — what folly! "And followeth after the east wind," — of all winds the most fierce and scorching. "He daily increaseth lies and desolation," deceitful evil and its recompence even now, as well as by and by. "And they do make a covenant with the Assyrians, and oil is carried into Egypt." They might like to curry favour again with the mighty; but their false heart, breaking the covenant, and seeking to win Egypt also by presenting what they could expect abundantly, only made the Assyrian their enemies; and so end all efforts at setting one power against another to one's own advantage. It is unworthy even of a man, how much more of the people of God!

"Jehovah hath also a controversy with Judah, and will punish Jacob according to his ways; according to his doings will he recompense him." It was not Ephraim only but Judah too which was in question, though not yet so far gone as the rest. This gives the link reminding them of the ancient history of their common father. "He took his brother by the heel in the womb, and by his strength he had power with God." From the first Jacob did that which indicated the supplanting of his brother on the one hand, before it could be set down to developed character, but on the other God recalls what grace did when it gave him strength beyond his own in his weakness. When he was shrunk up in the sinew of his thigh he was strengthened of God to prevail with the angel, and acquired the name which pledges the blessing of grace and all overcoming to the seed of Abraham. "Yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed: he wept, and made supplication unto him." What! The man who cowered and wept for fear of Esau? The self-same man on that very same occasion, when full of plans though not without prayer at the alarming approach of Esau, learns the sufficiency of grace, and has this strength made perfect in his weakness. "He found him in Bethel, and there he spake with us [identifying strikingly and touchingly the children with their forefathers] even Jehovah the God of hosts; Jehovah is his memorial. Therefore turn thou to thy God: keep mercy and judgment, and wait on thy God

continually." What a withering rebuke in verses 7, 8! "A merchant [Canaan], the balance of deceit in his hand, he loveth to overreach! And Ephraim said, I am simply become rich; I have found me out substances: it is all my labours. They will find no iniquity in me that is sin." How often prosperity blinds to evil, and God's judgment those who should know both.

In verse 9 Jehovah binds together His deliverance of Israel from Egypt with that mercy which will yet make good what the feast of tabernacles pledged; in verse 10 He reminds them of this extraordinary testimony when they ruined themselves by breaking this law and forsaking Himself; in verse 11 He sets before them the lamentable and ruinous witness of their idolatry. Then in verse 12 their father Jacob is once more held up to rebuke them, who fled in weakness, but served faithfully — sad contrast of his sons; and yet, though brought by God's word and power out of Egypt, most bitterly did Ephraim provoke to anger now therefore should his Lord leave his blood-guiltiness on him and requite his reproach to him.

In Hosea 13 we see that when Ephraim spake, there was trembling, so exalted was he in Israel: "When he offended in Baal, he died. And now they sin more and more, and have made them molten images of their silver, and idols according to their own understanding, all of it the work of the craftsmen; they say of them, Let the men that sacrifice kiss the calves." Hence was so great a change, and the downfall of his power; their prosperity was as evanescent as the lightest things men speak of in proverbs. Yet again Jehovah reminds them of His relation to them from the beginning. Himself the only true God and Saviour. His very mercy was too much for them. He should now show Himself an avenger (verses 7, 8). Truly, as it is so earnestly put, "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help."* The sovereign grace of God is the only hope and help for His sinful people. Of this Israel will reap the benefit, as we are doing.

{*The words probably mean, literally, "Thy destruction, Israel, [is] that [thou art] against me, against thyself."}

Where was now their king to save? where their judges? Alas! the words recall another early history of sin and rebellion and of God's displeasure. Yet Ephraim clung only to his sin (ver. 12), hid instead of confessing it.. The very patience of God only makes the blow the more sudden and felt when it falls. What folly not to come forth when safety depends on promptness? But man's extremity is God's opportunity, who will deliver when all hope is gone. How unlike the king whom He gave once in wrath, who brought them into such a state of degradation that they could not even sharpen the mattock in the land of Israel, but were obliged to their bitterest enemies for the barest means of subsistence! Jehovah assuredly will take the matter in hand, and then not merely their enemies, but death and the grave would be put down. Let them summon plagues and array pestilence as they may, Jehovah will conquer on behalf of His people.

To apply this to any thing past in Israel's history is extravagantly poor. But it is a mistake to think that they will not be accomplished magnificently in Israel's future deliverance. Gentile "conceit," as the apostle warns in Rom. 11, easily falls into such oversight, in its eagerness to take all the blessings to itself, leaving all the curses, and only these, to Israel. The New Testament gives a still richer turn, and reads a deeper truth in the words; but this in no way warrants our alienating the ancient people of God in the latter day from their predicted blessing through Jehovah's grace, when our Lord reigns, the all-conquering King of Israel, Jesus the Christ. Deliverance will come when the last Assyrian, the king of the north of Daniel, strikes his last blow — not as of old carrying off the people, but himself falling far more miserably than Samaria then met her punishment at his hands.

Then most beautifully winding up the prophecy, we have in Hosea 14 no scattered leaf of the

Sibyl, but what ought to be here and nowhere else — the final operation and effect of divine grace on the long-guilty, long-hardened people of God. The appeals, the reminiscences, the warnings, and the mercy are no longer in vain; but at length by the Spirit poured into the heart of Israel (who bow at last to that gracious Jehovah whose long-suffering had waited upon them many days — ages of His own dishonour through them — waiting for these latter days) the blessed time of Israel's restoration to their God in their own land. Fitly therefore at the end, and assuredly not in vain, comes the call: "O Israel, return unto Jehovah thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity." How true and wholesome is the word of God I "Take with you words, and turn to Jehovah: say unto him, Take away all iniquity." He would not leave them without a suited word to Him, for He loves to provide all; He would put no words less than these into their lips: "Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously." Would they have ventured to ask so much? Lord, teach us to ask from Thee — we need this — as well as to act for Thee. "So will we render the calves of our lips."

All is judged now aright; because self is judged before the God who brings them near Him. Their repentance is genuine and the fruit of grace. "Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses." All their vain resources are now and for ever abandoned. "Neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods: for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy." Idolatry had been the inlet of all mischief at home, as well as the outlet to pride in the world. Then comes Jehovah's answer from verse 4: "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him. I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon." What mercy in the face of wayward inconstancy and hearts only firm in rebellion! What tender love as well as mercy! Love free and full whose motive is in God Himself, who once smote His people in anger, but now will be as the dew to them so long without one drop of moisture to refresh them! How will not Israel then flourish! As the lily for form and graceful elegance; as Lebanon for stability; as the unfading olive for beauty (no longer under the morning cloud), and with the fragrance of Lebanon. "They that dwell under his shade shall return; they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine; the scent as the vine of Lebanon." What will the receiving back of Israel be to all the world but life from the dead?

True and faithful is the sovereign grace of God. It is not salvation in the meagre sense that the Jews will be screened from deserved destruction. If Jehovah saves, He will do it evermore for earth or heaven in a way that is worthy of Himself. "Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols? I have heard him, and observed him: I am like a green fir-tree. From me is thy fruit found." It appears to be a conversation between Ephraim and Jehovah. "Ephraim [shall say], "What have I to do any more with idols?" To this Jehovah answers, "I myself have heard and observed him." Thereon Ephraim replies, "I am like a green fir tree;" to which Jehovah rejoins, "From me is thy fruit found." What a blessed change for Ephraim! and what communion with their God!

The whole of this terse prophecy ends with the searching question of the closing verse — "Who is wise, that he may understand these things? intelligent, that he may know them? for the ways of Jehovah are right, and the transgressors shall stumble thereon." May this wisdom be given to us, that we too may understand Himself and His ways! "He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever;" and this being the desire, he "shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God." "None of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand."