Synopsis of the Books of the Bible

Ezekiel

John Nelson Darby (1800-1882)

Public domain edition

Introduction

The viewpoint of the prophet — in captivity

In the prophecy of Ezekiel we have left the touching ground we were on in Jeremiah. He was within with the judgment hanging over the guilty city, and under the oppressive sense of the evil which brought on the ruin, bearing a testimony which, as to apparent result, was of no avail, though it maintained, in personal sorrow of heart according to human measure, the glory of God.

Ezekiel had been carried into captivity with the king Jehoiachin; at least, he was one of those made captive at that time, and he habitually dates his prophecies from that period — an important thing to remark that we may understand the revelations made to him. For himself there is no more question either of dates or of kings, of Judah or of Israel. The people of God are in captivity among the Gentiles. Israel is looked at as a whole; the interests of the whole nation are before the eye of the prophet. At the same time the capture of Jerusalem under Zedekiah had not yet taken place. This occasions the revelation of that king's iniquity, the measure of which was filled up by his rebellion. For Nebuchadnezzar attached value to the oath made in the name of Jehovah. He counted upon the respect due to that name, and Zedekiah had not respected it.

The general contents of the Book

The first twenty-three chapters contain testimonies from God against Israel in general, and against Jerusalem in particular. After that the surrounding nations are judged; and then, beginning with chapter 33, the prophet resumes the subject of Israel, announcing their restoration as well as their judgment. Finally from chapter 40 to the end we have the description of the temple and of the division of the land.

Chapter 1

The date of the beginning of the book

In Ezekiel 1 we find a date* which refers to the year of Josiah's passover, but with what intent I do not know. It has been thought that the thirty years relate to the jubilee. On this point I cannot speak with confidence. But other circumstances are very important. [*Ed. note: W. Kelly has a helpful comment here: "The thirtieth year" (Ezek. 1:1) has greatly perplexed the learned. But it seems plain that the starting-point is the era of Nabopolassar, father of Nebuchadnezzar, who became king of Babylon, B.C. 625, about the date when Hilkiah found the book of the law in the temple so pregnant with blessing to Josiah and the righteous in Judah. This last is referred to in the Chaldee paraphrase of Jonathan ben Uzziel. ("Ezekiel", in loco)]

The universal sovereign throne of God seen outside Jerusalem

The throne of God is not seen in Jerusalem, but unconnected with this city, and outside. It is the universal sovereign throne of God. God judges the city itself from this throne. The prophecy commences with the description of the throne. We have the attributes of God as the supporters of His throne, under the likeness of the four categories of created beings on earth, the four being united in one, at least the four heads of these categories. These symbols are nearly the same as those used by the pagan inventors of idolatry to represent their gods. Formal idolatry began with a figurative personification of the attributes of God. These attributes became their gods, men being impelled to worship them by demons who governed them by this means, so that it was these demons whom men worshipped — a worship that soon degenerated so far that they set up gods wherever there was anything to desire or to fear, or that answered to the lusts which inspired these desires or these fears (sentiments which the demon cultivated also, in order to appropriate to himself the worship due to God alone). Now these attributes belonged to the only God, the Creator, and the head of all creation; but, whatever their power and glory might be in action, they were but the supporters of the throne on which the God of truth is seated.* Whatever instruments He may employ, it is the mighty energy of God that manifests itself. Intelligence, strength, stability, and swiftness in judgment, and, withal, the movement of the whole course of earthly events, depended on the throne. This living energy animated the whole. The cherubic supporters of the throne, full of eyes themselves, moved by it; the wheels of God's government moved by the same spirit, and went straight forward. All was subservient to the will and purpose of Him who sat on the throne judging right. Majesty, government, and providence, united to form the throne of His glory. But all the instruments of His glory were below the firmament; He whom they glorified was above. It is He whom the heathen knew not. {* Wise infidels, always petty in their conceptions because they know not God, have seen in the winged human-headed bulls and lions of Nineveh the origin of Ezekiel's vision. They betray themselves. They do not see or know Him who sat above them. I do not doubt a moment that these images represented the same thing essentially as the cherubim; but these poor pagans, misled by Satan, like these infidels in their wisdom, worshipped what was below the firmament. In Ezekiel's vision they were merely symbolic attributes, and He who was worshipped was above the firmament. It is just the difference in this respect between idolatry and the revelation of God.}

God's throne outside His people, among the Gentiles

This throne of the supreme and sovereign Lord God is seen in Chaldea* — in the place where the prophet then was — among the Gentiles. It is no longer seen at Jerusalem in connection with the land; nor have we any law embodied, so to speak, in the throne, according to which an immediate government was exercised. Consequently the voice of God speaks to Ezekiel as to a "son of man" — a title that suited the testimony of a God who spoke outside of His people, as being no longer in their midst, but on the contrary was judging them from the throne of His sovereignty. It is Christ's own title, looked at as rejected and outside of Israel, although He never ceases to think of the blessing of the people in grace. This puts the prophet in connection with the position of Christ Himself. He would not, thus rejected, allow His disciples to announce Him as the Christ (Luke 9), for the Son of man was to suffer. {* I mean merely in the limits of the empire of the Chaldeans. It was by the river Chebar, which was more to the north-west. This distinction is always carefully maintained, based on Psalms 2 and 8.

(Compare Nathanael, John 1.)}

Chapter 2

Ezekiel sent to a rebellious people with God's message

In testimony and example, as to his prophetic relation, the same thing happens in Ezekiel's case. God is rejected; His prophet takes this place, with the throne, to judge the whole nation, and especially Jerusalem, announcing at the same time (to faith) their re-establishment in grace. He is sent from Jehovah to a rebellious people, to say, Jehovah has spoken, whether they would hear or not. The judgment would make it known that a prophet had been among them. His first testimony is composed of lamentations, and mourning, and woe; nevertheless the communication of the word of God is always full of sweetness, looked at as a revelation from Him, and as taking place between God and man (Ezek. 2).

Some important principles in the relations of God with Israel are developed in Ezekiel 3.

Ezekiel's testimony compared with that of Jeremiah

But we have yet to notice a feature that characterises the Book of Ezekiel, comparing it with that of Jeremiah. The latter addresses himself immediately to his contemporaries (that is to say, to the people of God) in a testimony which, making its way through the bruised and wounded heart of the prophet, exhibits the marvellous patience of God, who, up to the last moment, invites His people to repentance. It is not thus with Ezekiel. He announces that which necessitates the judgment. He is sent indeed to Israel, but to Israel in a hardened condition. His mouth is shut as to the people; he is not to rebuke them. He may communicate to them certain declarations of Jehovah at a suitable time, when Jehovah opens his mouth to make them understand that there is a prophet among them; but he does not address himself directly and morally to the people, as being still the object of God's dealings. Jehovah reveals to him the iniquities that oblige Him to cast off His people, and no longer to act towards them on principles of government established by Himself, as with a people whom He acknowledged. It is, on God's part, a setting forth of Israel's conduct as the occasion of the rupture of His relations with them. At the same time certain new principles of conduct are revealed. I speak of that part of the prophecy which relates to Israel; for there are also sundry judgments upon the Gentiles, and a description of the future state of the land, as well as of the temple — a state which the prophet was to communicate to Israel in case they should repent.

Chapter 3

The remnant distinguished; individuals warned

Ezekiel 3. The Lord testifies that Israel is even more hardened than any of the heathen nations. The people are "impudent and hard-hearted." It needed that Ezekiel should have his forehead made as hard

as adamant to speak to them the word which he had to declare, saying, "Whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear." The prophet is carried away by the power of the Spirit into the midst of the captives at Tel-abib. Although the house of Israel was hardened, God distinguished a remnant; and in this manner. The prophet was to warn individuals: it was to this work he was appointed. If his word was received, he who hearkened should be spared. Ezekiel should be responsible for the fulfilment of this duty: but each one should bear the consequences of his own conduct, after he had heard the word. Thus the people are no longer judged as a whole, as was the case when all depended on the public conduct of the nation or of the king. Israel had revolted, but still he that hearkened to the word should live. God was acting in accordance with His long-suffering grace. The prophet again sees the glory of Jehovah by himself, and the Spirit announces to him that he is not to go out among the people, but that he shall be a prisoner in his house, and that God will make his tongue cleave to the roof of his mouth; for they were a rebellious people, and, as a people, the warning was not to be given them. God, when He pleased, would open the mouth of the prophet, and he should speak peremptorily to the people, declaring the word of Jehovah. Let him hear that would, Jehovah would no longer plead in love, as He had done.

Chapter 4

The siege of Jerusalem: the dates of the years of iniquity leading to Israel's judgment

Ezekiel 4. Besides the general judgment that God pronounced upon the condition of Israel, Jerusalem — on whom lay all the iniquity of the people now come to its height — appears before God whom she had despised. The prophet, in representing the siege of Jerusalem, was also to point out the years of iniquity that had led to this judgment: for Israel in general, 390; for Judah, 40. It is certain that these dates do not refer to the duration of the kingdom of Israel apart from Judah, nor to that of Judah, because the kingdom of Israel only lasted about 254 years, while that of Judah continued about 134 years after the fall of Samaria. It would appear that the longer period mentioned is reckoned from the separation of the ten tribes under Rehoboam, counting the years as those of Israel, because from that moment Israel had a separate existence, and comprised the great body of the nation; while Judah was everything during the reign of Solomon, which lasted forty years. After his reign Judah would be comprised in the general name of Israel according to Ezekiel's usual habit, although on certain occasions he distinguishes them on account of the position of Zedekiah and of God's future dealings. The reason for using this name of Israel for the whole is plain enough, namely, that the captivity had placed the whole nation in the same condition and under one common judgment, and Israel was the name of the whole people. The entire nation was now set aside, and a Gentile kingdom established. Judah is sometimes distinguished, because there was still a remnant at Jerusalem — judged indeed yet more severely than the mass, but which nevertheless existed, and which will have distinct circumstances in their history until the last days. The same thing happens in the New Testament. In the language of the apostles the twelve tribes are blended. Nevertheless, as a matter of history, the Jews — that is to say, those of Judah — are always distinct. In the main, Ezekiel prophesied under the same circumstances. Hence, in part, as we have said, his title of "son of man," given also to Daniel, as well as

that of "man greatly beloved." The man of power was Nebuchadnezzar. But he who represented the race before God was an Ezekiel, as the man of desire was a Daniel, a man beloved of God.

With respect to the date, it is certain that the 390 years are almost exactly the time of Israel's duration from the death of Solomon to the destruction of the temple. Some persons have wished to reckon the forty years of Judah from Josiah's passover down to the same period, supposing that the destruction of the temple by Nebuchadnezzar took place four or five years after the captivity of Zedekiah; but this was not the case — it was a month later in the same year. Jehoiachin was carried into captivity in the eighth year of Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 24:12). Zedekiah reigned eleven years (Jer. 52:1). In the nineteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuzar-adan burnt the house of Jehovah, and, reading from verse 6, we see that it was a month after in the same year. In taking the forty years of Judah to be the reign of Solomon, it would be saying that Israel had done nothing but sin ever since the establishment of the kingdom, for it was only in the days of Solomon that there was a peaceful reign. David founded the kingdom. The responsibility of his family began with Solomon (2 Sam. 7).

Chapters 5 and 6

Israel reminded of God's just judgments on Jerusalem; a small remnant spared

In the revelation given to Ezekiel Jerusalem is taken, and its population almost entirely destroyed. The dispersed remnant are pursued by the sword, and a portion only of this remnant is spared. There would be some even of this portion cast into the fire.* And this fire should reach to the whole house of Israel. That is to say, the judgment that should fall upon the remnant who do not perish in the city should represent the position of all Israel. It is thus that the prophet is constantly led to speak of the whole nation. For, as long as there was a remnant at Jerusalem, the nation had a place on the earth. But when the iniquitous rebellion of Zedekiah had led to the destruction of Jerusalem, this was no longer the case. But this judgment of Jerusalem contains very important elements for the understanding of all this part of the history of the people and of the dealings of God, "This is Jerusalem, saith the Lord Jehovah; I have set it in the midst of the nations and countries round about her." And instead of being a testimony in the midst of the nations, so that the house of Jehovah should have attracted them, or at least have placed them under responsibility by a true testimony to God who dwelt there — instead of this, her inhabitants had even gone beyond the idolatrous nations in wickedness. Therefore God would execute judgments upon her in the sight of all the nations — a just retribution for her sins. She should also be laid waste and made a reproach among the nations round about her; and (Ezek. 6) the judgment should not be confined to Jerusalem, it should be executed on all the high places, on all the mountains of Israel. Every city should be desolate, all their idols destroyed, and the people scattered. They should know that the Lord had not threatened them in vain with His judgments. The fire should reach those that were afar off as well as those that were in the land; and the land should be laid waste, and the worshippers of idols slain around their infamous gods. Nevertheless God would remember mercy in the midst of judgment; He would spare a little remnant of those who were scattered, and those who should escape should loathe themselves for the abominations they had committed. Thus Jerusalem was judged as well as the

mountains of Israel, which were but too notorious for their idols and their high places. {* It is thus that I understand this passage. We should imagine, from our translation, that it was some of the hairs that were cast into the fire. But in the Hebrew the pronoun is in the singular, and it is masculine as well as feminine.}

Chapter 7

Solemn judgment pronounced on the whole land: Israel no longer a nation

Finally (Ezek. 7), the whole land of Israel is under the sentence of God, "the four corners of the land." Those who escape the general judgment mourn alone upon the mountains, having forsaken all in despair — having no power for resistance. The worst of the heathen should possess the land. And the ornament of the majesty of Jehovah, which He had established in glory, having been profaned by their abominations, should be given up into the hands of strangers to be profaned by them. The secret place of His holiness should be polluted. Mischief should come upon mischief, and there should be no remedy. Jehovah would judge the people according to their deserts.

Solemn judgment was thus pronounced on the whole nation. All is desolate, and with respect to the relations of Israel with God — whether on the part of the people themselves, or by means of the house of David which was responsible for the maintenance of these relations — all was finally lost. Grace may act; but the people and the house of David had totally failed. The name of God had been blasphemed through His people, instead of being glorified. The execution of judgment is now the only testimony rendered to Him. The judgment is complete, it has fallen on the four corners of the land, and Israel is no longer a nation. What a solemn thought it is, that judgment should be the only testimony that can be given to God!

Ezekiel 7 closes this first prophecy, which is one of vast importance, as declaring the judgment to be fully executed upon the people of God on earth.

Chapter 8

The period before the destruction of the temple: the iniquity and hypocrisy of the Jews

Ezekiel 8 begins a new prophecy, which comprises several distinct revelations, and extends to the close of chapter 19 (from the eighth to the end of the eleventh being connected). Judah still existed at Jerusalem, although many of them had already been carried into captivity with Jehoiakim. It was not till five years later that the temple was destroyed. It is the state of things at Jerusalem which is judged in these chapters. The elders of Judah presented themselves before the prophet, and Jehovah took this opportunity to shew him all the enormities that would bring down judgment on the people. In the prophecy of the preceding year God, by the mouth of the prophet, had threatened Israel with the giving up of His sanctuary to the profane (chap. 7:20-22). Here Jehovah exhibits in detail the cause of this

judgment. The glory of Jehovah appeared to the prophet, and he was taken in the visions of God to Jerusalem, and there in the courts and the chambers, and in the gates, he was shewn every form of hateful and defiling idolatry practised in Jehovah's own house by the elders and others of Israel. If we compare the history of Jeremiah, and the outward profession that was made — the pretension that the law should not perish from the priest, we shall understand the excessive iniquity of the Jews and their hypocrisy.

Chapter 9

The glory of Jehovah visiting the temple and manifesting the heinous sins there

The glory of Jehovah visits the temple. He takes His place on the side that looked towards the city, and, after having shewn the prophet the heinous sins committed there, He gives command to execute the deserved vengeance, but to spare the remnant who mourned over all these abominations. That which declares morally the state of heart of the wicked, and which made them give the loose rein to their iniquity, is that the absence of Jehovah's intervention on account of their sins, had so acted on their belief as to make them say, "Jehovah has forsaken the earth and Jehovah sees not." This was obduracy of heart.

Chapter 10

Jehovah's personal intervention to show the evil, mark the mourners and direct the judgment

In Ezekiel 10 the whole city is given up to be consumed. The glory of Jehovah presides over the judgment and commands it. He stands upon the threshold of His house which He fills with His glory in judgment, as He had formerly done in blessing. The throne of Jehovah was apart. We have a renewed description of all its parts. Jehovah left His throne and stood on the threshold of the house. This is an interesting element of this judgment. The cherubim and the terrible wheels instinct with living energy and full of eyes could have accomplished all. But Jehovah leads the prophet to take personal cognisance of the various and abominable sins and idolatries by which they profaned His sanctuary. No doubt His providential government wrought in power to carry out His judgment, but it was the Jehovah of the defiled house who stood personally on its threshold to direct the judgment of the city, and personally have a mark put on the godly and secure them in the hastening judgment (Ezek. 9:3-4, following, and from beginning of Ezek. 8). This personal intervention of Jehovah, both to shew the evil well known to Him, to mark and spare the mourners, and to direct the judgment, is full of interest.

Chapter 11

The leaders judged; the remnant distinguished; the glory forsakes the city

In Ezekiel 11 God judges the leaders of iniquity, who comforted themselves in the thought that the city was impregnable.* They should be brought out from the midst thereof and be judged in the border of Israel. One of these wicked men dies in the presence of the prophet, which brings out the sorrow of his heart and his intercession for Israel. In reply, God distinguishes those in Jerusalem from the captives. As to the latter, God had been a sanctuary to them wherever they were. He would restore them, and give them back the land. He would purify them, and give them a new heart. They should be His people, and He would be their God. But as for those who walked after their abominations, their ways should be visited upon them in judgment. The remnant are always distinguished, and individual conduct is the condition of blessing, save that they, the faithful, are established as the people of God at the end. {* Jeremiah's exhortations will be remembered — to submit themselves to Nebuchadnezzar, and even to quit the city and go forth unto him.}

The glory of Jehovah then forsakes the city and stands upon the Mount of Olives, from which Jesus ascended, and to which He will again descend for Israel's glory. This part of the prophecy ends here.

Chapter 12

The flight, capture and blindness of Zedekiah predicted

Ezekiel 12 announces the fight and the capture of Zedekiah, who would be carried to Babylon though he would. not see it. All the force of Judah would be dispersed, and the land laid desolate; a small remnant of captives would declare among the heathen the abominations which had brought the judgment; and the judgment was soon to come, for God's patience with His people had led to the unbelieving comment that God would not interfere, but now the effect of His words would not be delayed.

Chapters 13 and 14

The false prophets and the people punished together

Ezekiel 13 judges the prophets who deceived the people in Jerusalem by their pretended visions of peace.

In Ezekiel 14 the elders of Israel come and sit before the prophet. Here God sets distinctly before Israel the new principles on which He would govern them. These elders had put their abominations before their eyes. God Himself will judge them according to their transgressions. As a nation they were all alike. Jehovah could only say to them, "Repent ye." The prophets and the people should be punished together. Even if the most excellent of the earth should be found in a land which Jehovah judged, they would not hinder the execution of the judgment, they would only save their own lives by their righteousness. God did not own a nation (the only one He had He had now rejected); He did, the

individually righteous (compare Gen. 18). Now God was bringing all His judgments upon Jerusalem. Nevertheless, a remnant should be spared; and the proofs they would give of the abominations committed in the city would comfort the prophet with respect to the judgments accomplished on it. And so it is: the judgment of God, who gives His people up to their enemies, is a burden to the heart of one who loves the people; but when the manner in which the name of God had been dishonoured is seen, the necessity of the judgment is understood and felt.

Chapter 15

The only end of a fruitless vine

Ezekiel 15 shews that the vine — utterly useless if it bore no fruit — was fit only for fuel, and to be consumed. Thus should it be with the inhabitants of Jerusalem — a striking picture of this destruction, and of the condition of Jerusalem, which was worth nothing more.

Chapter 16

Jerusalem justly condemned and humbled by Samaria and Sodom; Jehovah's sovereign grace

In reading Ezekiel 16 it must be remembered that Jerusalem is the subject, and not Israel. Moreover, the subject treated of is not redemption, but God's dealings. He had caused to live, He had cleansed, ornamented, and anointed, that which was in misery and devoid of beauty. But Jerusalem had used all that Jehovah had given her in the service of her idols, and also to purchase the succour and the favour of the Egyptians and the Assyrians. She has had no idea of independence and of standing alone, leaning on Jehovah. She should be judged as an adulterous woman. Jehovah would bring against her those whom she had sought. Nevertheless, filled with pride, she would hear nothing of Samaria or of Sodom — names which Jehovah now uses to humble her. She was even more worthless than those whom she must own for her sisters, in spite of her pride. Jerusalem being thus justly condemned and humbled, God will yet act in full grace towards her, and will re-establish her, remembering His love and His covenant. She will never be restored on the former ground, any more than Samaria or Sodom; and the grace that will be exercised towards her shall suffice to bring them back also, namely, the sovereign grace of redemption and pardon, which is by no means the covenant of Jerusalem under the law. With Jerusalem Jehovah will also establish a special covenant, and her two sisters shall be given her for daughters. Her mouth shall be shut at the thought of all the grace of God who shall have pardoned her. The fifty-fifth verse is absolute and perpetual. The promise, in verse 60, is on entirely new ground. Samaria, Sodom, Jerusalem, go together in judgment; but sovereign grace has its own way and time, and thus all three might be and would be restored, but Jehovah would establish His covenant with Jerusalem. The free unconditional covenant of promise would be made good to Jerusalem (Ezek. 16:8).

Chapter 17

Zedekiah's judgment for despising the oath taken in Jehovah's name

Ezekiel 17 present the judgment of Zedekiah for despising the oath that Nebuchadnezzar made him take in the name of Jehovah. Israel not having been able to stand in integrity before God, Jehovah had committed the kingdom to the head of the Gentiles, whom He had raised up. This was His determinate purpose; but He had disposed the heart of Nebuchadnezzar to respect the name of Jehovah, and Judah might still have remained the centre of religious blessing, and the lamp of David might still have given light there, although the royalty had been subjected to the head of the Gentiles, until the time should come for the result of the judgment and dealings of God. The covenant between Nebuchadnezzar and Zedekiah was made on this ground, and the name of Jehovah was brought in to confirm it. It was not the Gentile who broke the covenant. Zedekiah added to his other sins that of rendering impossible the existence of a people and a kingdom that belonged to God. The name of Jehovah was more despised and trampled under foot by him than by the Gentile king. He intrigues with Egypt to escape from the dominion of Nebuchadnezzar, whom God Himself, in judgment, had set up as supreme. This filled up the measure of iniquity, and brought on the final judgment. But it left room for the sovereignty of God, who would bring down the high tree and exalt the low tree, who would dry up the green tree and make the dry tree to flourish. His grace would take the little forgotten branch of the house of David and raise it up in Israel upon the mountain of His power, where He would cause it to become a goodly cedar, bearing fruit, and sheltering all that would seek the protection of its shadow. All the powers of the earth should know the word and the works of Jehovah.

Chapters 18 and 19

Each one judged according to his own ways

Ezekiel 18 contains an important principle of the dealings of God, unfolded at that period. God would judge the individual according to his own conduct; the wicked nation was judged as such. Neither was it, in fact, judged for the iniquity of the fathers. The present iniquities of the people made the judgment which their fathers had merited suitable to their own actions. But now, with respect to His land of Israel, the principle of government laid down in Exodus 34:7 was set aside, and souls belonging, as they did individually, to Jehovah, would individually bear the judgment of their own sins. God would pardon the repenting sinner. For He has no pleasure in the sinner's death. The government of Israel on earth is still the subject. Every one shall be judged according to his ways.* {* It is important to remark that it is temporal judgment in death which is spoken of here. The question treated of is the allegation of Israel that they, according to the principle laid down in Exodus, were suffering for their fathers' sins. The prophet declares that this principle is not that on which God will act with them, that the soul or life of every one belonged to God, one as another, and that in judgment He would deal with each for his own sins, not the son for the father's; and then proceeds to lay down the principles on which He would deal in mercy and judgment; but the judgments are temporal judgments, and the death physical death in this world. If the wicked turned from his ways, he would live and not die — not be cut off for the sins he repented of; so of the wicked, he shall surely die, his blood shall be upon him. So the soul that sinneth, it shall die. It is not the father, nor the son because of a father's sins; the soul or person himself

that sins shall die, each for his own. The emphasis is on "it."}

Ezekiel 19 describes the captivity of Jehoiakim, afterwards that of Jeconiah, and finally the complete decay of the house of David.

Chapters 20 and 21

The people's sin and idolatry retraced: God's judgment

Ezekiel 20 begins a new prophecy, which, with its subdivisions, continues to the end of chapter 23. It will have been remarked that the general divisions are made by years. Chapter 20 is important. The preceding chapters had spoken of the sin of Jerusalem. Here the Spirit retraces the sin, and especially the idolatry of Israel (that is to say, of the people, as a people) from the time of their sojourn in Egypt. Then already they had begun with their idolatry. For His own name's sake God had brought them up from thence, and given them His statutes and His sabbaths — the latter too in token of the covenant between God and the people. But Israel had rebelled against God in the wilderness, and even then He had thought to destroy them. But He spared them, warning at the same time their children also, who nevertheless followed their fathers' ways. Still, for His name's sake, God withdrew His hand on account of the heathen in whose sight He had brought the people up from Egypt. But in the wilderness He had already warned them that He would scatter them among the nations (Lev. 26, Deut. 32); and as they had polluted the sabbaths of Jehovah and gone after the idols of their fathers, they should be polluted in their own gifts, and be slaves to the idols they had loved, that they might be made desolate by the Lord. For, having been brought into the promised land, they had forsaken Jehovah for the high places. He would no longer be enquired of by them, but would rule over them with fury and with an outstretched arm. He had already in the wilderness threatened the people with dispersion among the heathen; and now, having brought them into the land for the glory of His great name, Israel had only dishonoured Him. He, therefore, executes the judgment with which He had threatened them. Israel, always ready to forsake Jehovah, would have profited by this to become like the heathen. But God comes in at the end in His own ways. He keeps the people separate in spite of themselves, and He will gather them out from among the nations and bring them into the wilderness, as when He led them out of Egypt, and there He will cut off the rebels, sparing a remnant, who alone shall enter the land. For it is there that Jehovah shall be worshipped by His people, when He shall have gathered them out from all the countries where they have been scattered, and Jehovah Himself shall be sanctified in Israel before the heathen. Israel shall know that He is Jehovah, when He shall have accomplished all these things according to His promises. They shall loathe themselves, and shall understand that Jehovah has wrought for the glory of His name, and not according to their wicked ways.

This is the general judgment of the nation, and in fact of the ten tribes as distinct from Judah. They, as a body, were not guilty of the rejection of the blessed Lord. They had been long scattered for their rebellion against Jehovah. They will be brought back, but passed as a flock under the rod of the covenant, the rebels purged out, and only the spared remnant enter the land. They will not thus be in the special tribulation of the last half week, nor under Antichrist. They are dealt with in the national government of God. Judah will of course be in verse 40, but the object is to shew it is not simply Judah,

the Jews as we say. Israel in the land, the whole people will enjoy the blessings once promised. But this brings out some important principles. Though the original promises are referred to and exist for the full blessing, yet the dealings of Jehovah begin with the land of Egypt. Next there is an accumulation of sin. The Lord's sparing mercy, when it only made them go on in greater oblivion of His goodness, only aggravated and accumulated the evil, as the Lord speaks, from Abel to Zacharias. Thus the people are judged in view of their conduct, from the time of their departure from Egypt; their idolatrous spirit was manifested even in Egypt itself (compare Amos 5:25-26; Acts 7). Jehovah had indeed spared the people for the glory of His name, but the sin was still there. Israel as a nation is therefore scattered, and then placed anew under the rod of the covenant, and God distinguishes the remnant, and acts for the sure accomplishment in sovereign grace of that of which the people were incapable as placed under their own responsibility. Israel, as a whole, as a nation, is distinguished from Judah, which continues in a particular position. With regard to the nation, as such, the rebels are cut off and do not enter the land. In the land two-thirds are cut off at the end (Zech. 13:8-9). But in this latter case, it is the Jews who were guilty of the rejection and death of Jesus who are judged. Here it is the dealings of God with the nation — guilty from the time of Egypt; there it is the chastisement of the enemies and murderers of Christ. Grace is shewn in both cases to the remnant.

The beginning of "the times of the Gentiles"

From verse 45 it is another prophecy, which contains the application of the threats in the preceding prophecy to the circumstances through which it will be fulfilled, by the invasion of Nebuchadnezzar, as unfolded in chapter 21. Jehovah had unsheathed and sharpened His sword to return it no more to its sheath: it was prepared for the slaughter. The prophet sees Nebuchadnezzar at the head of the two roads to Jerusalem and to Ammon. Jerusalem would treat that which he was doing as a false divination, but she would be overtaken by the judgment of Jehovah. Their conduct had brought their whole sinful course to mind, and the profane Zedekiah (who had filled up the iniquity by despising the oath which he had taken in Jehovah's name) should come to his end when the iniquity was judged; for he had filled up its measure. Moreover, it was now a definitive judgment, and not a chastisement which would allow the unsheathed sword to return to its scabbard, as for His name's sake they had been so often spared as we have seen rehearsed in the chapter. In fact it was a revolution in God's ways, a taking His throne from the earth and the beginning of the times of the Gentiles. Jehovah overturned everything until He should come, to whom in right it all belonged, and to whom the kingdom should be given; that is to say, until Christ. Ammon likewise should be destroyed.

Government entrusted to the Gentiles: Israel proved radically evil

The more these prophecies of Ezekiel and Jeremiah are considered, the more striking do they appear. First of all, they establish the very important fact with respect to the government of the world, namely, that the throne of God has been removed from the earth, and the government of the world entrusted to man under the form of an empire among the Gentiles. In the second place, the veil is also withdrawn as to the government of God in Israel. This test, to which man had been subjected, in order to see if he were capable of being blessed, has only proved the entire vanity of his nature, his rebellion, the folly of

his will, so that he is radically evil. Even from Egypt, it was a spirit of rebellion, idolatry, and unbelief, which preferred anything in the world, an idol, or the Assyrian, to Jehovah the true God. Constant in their sin, neither deliverance nor judgment, neither blessing nor experience of their folly, changed the heart of the people or the propensity of their nature. The idolatry that began in Egypt, and their contempt of the word of Jehovah, were not altered by their enjoyment of the promises, but characterised this people until their rejection of Jehovah. But on God's part we see a patience that never belies itself, the most tender care, the most touching appeals, everything that could tend to bring their hearts back to Jehovah; interventions in grace, to lift them out of their misery, and bless them when in a state of faithfulness produced by this grace, through the means of such or such a king; rising up early to send them prophets, until there was no remedy. But they gave themselves up to evil; and, as shewn by Ezekiel and Stephen, the Spirit of God returns to the first manifestations of their heart, of which all that followed was but the proof and the expression. And the judgment is executed on account of that which the people have been from the beginning.

Sovereign grace reigning in righteousness

After the full manifestation of that which the people were, God changes His plan of government, and reserves for sovereign grace the re-establishment of Israel according to His promises, which He would fulfil by His means who could maintain blessing by His power, and govern the people in peace.

It is not uninteresting to recall, that that sovereign grace, which blesses Israel at last and after all, when responsible human nature has been fully tried, is — though we come to it, where real, through definite conviction of our sins and sinfulness — as to God's ways, the starting point of our path and what belongs to us. Hence the necessity of a new nature, and God's love in giving His Son, are the opening of all to us. The cross for both secures the righteousness through which grace reigns.

Chapters 22 and 23

Jerusalem's sin recapitualted; God's judgment justified

Ezekiel 22 recapitulates the sin of Jerusalem, of her prophets, her priests, and her princes. The eye of God sought for some one to stand in the gap before Him, and found none. His indignation should consume them. What force the prophecies give to those words of the Lord, "How often would I have gathered thy children, as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"

In Ezekiel 23 Jehovah justifies Himself for judging Jerusalem by the iniquity and unfaithfulness of her walk. Her whoredom with the Gentiles brought her early course to mind. The same conduct shewed the same nature. She has ended as she began, because at heart she was the same. Samaria's lot should be hers. The latter is called a tent or tabernacle, and Jerusalem "My tabernacle in her."

Chapter 24

The beginning of the seige of Jerusalem; Ezekiel forbidden to mourn for his wife

In Ezekiel 24 definitive judgment is pronounced against Jerusalem, who was not even ashamed of her sins. The day that Nebuchadnezzar lays siege to Jerusalem, the wife of the prophet dies; and, although she was the dearest object of his affections, Ezekiel was not to mourn. Under the figure of his wife's death he is instructed to refrain his heart before the judgment of Jehovah. The judgment once executed, the mouth of the prophet would be opened, and the word of Jehovah openly addressed to the remnant, so that Jehovah should be known to them. Jerusalem should be set as a caldron on the fire to melt and consume the whole. God had purged her, but she was not purged; and now He causes His fury to rest upon her.

Chapter 25

Judgment pronounced on definite nations rejoicing at Jerusalem's destruction

Ezekiel 25 has an especial character. The nations that surrounded and that were within the territory of Israel rejoiced at the destruction of Jerusalem, and of the sanctuary. Therefore God would execute judgment upon them. Ammon, Moab, Edom, and the Philistines are the objects of this prophecy. The testimony of God against Edom is yet more developed in Obadiah. Thus, by the judgment that should fall upon them, should these nations know that, although Jerusalem had not been a faithful witness, Jehovah alone is God. Chapters 24 and 25 go together. Chapter 25 anticipates (although the date is similar) the events which gave rise to the manifestations of hatred that are the occasion of the judgments pronounced. But the spirit had shewn itself in these tribes or nations from the commencement of the desolations of Judah and Jerusalem. Their introduction here is easily to be understood, for these nations were to share the same fate, and are included in this judgment, because they are all upon Israel's territory. Another remarkable element (found also in other prophecies on Edom, and giving a wider meaning to the one we are considering), is, that it declares that the judgment which shall fall on Edom in the end shall be executed by the hand of Israel. Compare Obadiah 17, 18 with verse 14 of this chapter.

Chapters 26 to 28

Tyre judged as representing the world and its riches

Although in a certain sense upon Israel's territory, Tyre has another character, and is the subject of a separate prophecy (Ezek. 26 - 28), because it represents the world and its riches, in contrast with Israel as the people of God; and rejoices, not like the others from personal hatred, but because (having opposite interests) the destruction of that which restrained its career gave free course to its natural selfishness. It is worthy of remark in these prophecies, how God lays open all the thoughts of man with

respect to His people and that which they have been towards Him.

Tyre's ill-will to God's people and city judged

In Ezekiel 27, Tyre is judged for its ill-will to the people and the city of God. It is overthrown as a worldly system, and all that formed its glory disappears before the breath of Jehovah.

The prince and king of Tyre judged for their pride

In Ezekiel 28 it is the prince and the king of Tyre that are judged for their pride. Verses 1-10 set before us the prince of this world's glory as a man, exalting himself and seeking to present himself as a god, having acquired riches and glory by his wisdom. Verses 11-19, while continuing to speak of Tyre, go, I think, much farther, and disclose, though darkly, the fall and the ways of Satan, become through our sin the prince and god of this world. The prince of Tyre represents Tyre and the spirit of Tyre. The verses which follow (11-19) are much more personal. I do not doubt that, historically, Tyre itself is referred to; verses 16-19 prove it. But, I repeat, the mind of the Spirit goes much farther. The world and its kings are presented as the garden of Jehovah on account of the advantages they enjoy. (The outward government of God is in question, which till then had recognised the different nations around Israel). This however applies more especially to Tyre, which was situated in the territory of Israel, in Emmanuel's land, and which, in the person of Hiram, had been allied with Solomon, and had even helped to build the temple. Its guilt was proportionate. It is the world in relation with God, and if the prince of Tyre represents this state of things as being the world, and a world that has been highly exalted in its capabilities by this position — an exaltation of which it boasts in deifying itself, the king represents the position itself in which, under this aspect, the world has been placed, and the forsaking of which gives it the character of apostasy. It is this character which gives occasion for the declaration of the enemy's apostasy contained in these verses. He had been where the plants of God flourished,* he had been covered with precious stones (that is to say, with all the variety of beauty and perfection, in which the light of God is reflected and transformed when manifested in, and with respect to, creation). Here the varied reflection of these perfections had been in the creature: a creature was the means of their manifestation. It was not light, properly so called. (God is light; Christ is the light here below, and so far as He lives in us, we are light in Him). It was the effect of light acting in the creature, like a sunbeam in a prism. It is a development of its beauty, which is not its essential perfection, but which proceeds from it. {* We may see, Ezekiel 31:8-9, 16, that this is a description of the kings of the earth, at least before Nebuchadnezzar, who first substituted one sole dominion given by God, for the many kings of the nations recognised by God as the result of Babel, and in the centre of which His people were placed, to make the government of God known through their means. The special relation of Tyre with Israel added something to the position of the merchant city, and gave room also for the use made here of the history of its king as a type or figure of the prince of this world.}

The characteristics of the king of Tyre; his fall

The following are the features of the king of Tyre's character, or that of the enemy of God, the prince of this world. He is the anointed cherub — he is covered with precious stones — he has been in Eden the paradise of God, upon the mountain of God — he walked in the midst of the stones of fire — he was perfect in his ways until iniquity was found in him. He is cast out of the mountain of God on account of his iniquities; his heart was lifted up because of his beauty, and he corrupted himself. Farther, we find that which, as to the creature, is most exalted; he acts in the judicial government of God according to the intelligence of God (this is the character of the anointed cherub). He is clothed with the moral beauty that variously reflects the character of God as light.* He is recognised among the plants of God, in which God displayed His wisdom and His power in creation, according to His good pleasure, as Creator. He had been there also where the authority of God was exercised — on the mountain of God. He walked where the moral perfections of God were displayed in their glory, a glory before which evil could not stand — "the stones of fire." His ways had been perfect. But all these advantages were the occasion of his fall, and characterised it. For the privileges we enjoy always characterise our fall. Whence have we fallen? is the question; for it is the having failed there, when we possessed it, that degrades our condition. Moreover it is not an outward temptation, as in man's case — a circumstance which did not indeed take away man's guilt, but which modified its character. "Thy heart was lifted up because of thy beauty." He exalted himself against God, and he was cast out as profane from the mountain of God. His spirit, independent in security, was humbled when he was cast to the ground. His nakedness is manifested to all; his folly shall in the end be apparent to all. {* Observe that this takes place in the creature. In the case of Aaron, the type of Christ as priest, it exists in the absolute perfection of grace, which presents us to God according to His perfection in the light. It is afterwards seen in the glory as the foundation of the city, the bride, the Lamb's wife, in the Revelation. That is, these stones present the fruit of perfect light — what God is in His nature shining in and through the creature, in creation, grace, and glory.}

The judgment of Sidon; Israel's safety

The judgment of Sidon is added. And then, all hope having been taken from Israel, when the judgment of the nations is accomplished, God gathers them and causes them to dwell in their land in peace for ever.

Chapters 29 to 32

The judgment of Egypt and the fall of Assyria

Ezekiel 29-32 contain the judgment of Egypt. Egypt sought, in the self-will of man, to take the place which God had in fact given to Nebuchadnezzar. All must submit. The mighty empire of Asshur had already fallen. Pharaoh, whatever his pretensions and his ambition might be, was no better. We see this judgment of the Assyrian, the chief of all the nations as to his power, in Ezekiel 31:10-11; where the "mighty one of the heathen" is distinctly brought out — falling before this decree of God. Pharaoh would be consoled by seeing all the great ones of the earth overthrown like himself. Already fallen like the uncircumcised (that is, like people who were not owned of God, nor consequently upheld by Him),

all must give place to this new power in the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. That which characterised Egypt was the pride of nature, which would follow its own will, and owned no God (chap. 29:9). Such a principle shall no longer be the confidence of God's people (v. 16). Egypt should have her place, but should no longer rule. The judgment of Egypt should be the occasion of Israel's blessing. This reaches to the end. In the destruction of the Assyrian, God had shewn that He would not allow a nation to exalt itself in this manner. The will of man in Pharaoh did not alter His judgment. In Nebuchadnezzar, as we have seen, a new principle was introduced by God Himself into the world.

Observe that in Ezekiel 32:27 Meshech and Tubal are distinguished from the rest of the nations.

The importance and extent of the prophecy as to Egypt

This prophecy concerning Egypt has particular importance. It is composed of three distinct prophecies. The first (Ezek. 29, 30) is subdivided; the second, chapter 31; the third, chapter 32. But this last extends to the end of chapter 39, and embraces several subjects in connection with the fate of Israel in the last days. Observe that Ezekiel 29:17-21 is a prophecy of a very different date, introduced here on account of its relation to that which precedes it in the same chapter. Ezekiel 30:20-26 is also a distinct prophecy as to its date.

The judgments summarized: their result in Israel's re-establishment

Until Ezekiel 25 we principally found moral arguments with respect to the state of Israel; from thence to the end of chapter 32 it is rather the execution of the judgment. But the prophecy that announces this execution is remarkable in more than one respect. Nebuchadnezzar is looked at as executing the judgment of God, whose servant he is for the purpose of doing so on Jerusalem, now become pre-eminently the seat of iniquity although the sanctuary of God. At the same time God sets His land free, by these very judgments from all the nations that wrongfully possessed it. He brings to nought the haughty power of man in which Israel had trusted, that is, Egypt, which shall never rise again as a ruling nation. But it was the day of all nations. The result of these judgments, whether on rebellious Jerusalem or on the nations, should be at the same time the re-establishment of Israel according to promise and by the power of God in grace. The snares which had led them into evil were taken away (see Ezek. 26:16-21; Ezek. 27:34-36). Thus, although these events have had their historical accomplishment by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, the ways of God in view of the re-establishment of Israel have been manifested, as far as regards the judgments to be executed — judgment, through which all the nations, as well as Israel, who was their centre, disappear from the scene as nations. The Spirit, while recounting the execution of the judgments that were to fall on Asshur, Elam, and Meshech, gives details of those that had invaded the land or been snares to Israel. So that the prophetic recital of these very judgments contains in itself the assured hope granted to Israel by the efficacious grace of the Lord. I cannot doubt that all this prophecy of judgment relates — in a perspective brought nigh by the energy of the Spirit — to the events of the last days, which will be the complete fulfilment of these purposes and intentions of God.

In Ezekiel 30:3, we see that it is universal.* {* It will be remembered that with Nebuchadnezzar God set aside the order He had previously established in the world, revealed in Deuteronomy 32 (namely, of nations and peoples arranged around Israel as a centre). He owns Israel no longer as His people. Thus order then falls of itself, and Babel of old, the place of dispersion, becomes the centre of one absorbing empire. In connection with the fact that Israel is no longer owned as a people, being judged as such, God addresses Himself to individual conscience in the midst of the nation. But this was the judgment of the nations, and the call of a remnant. And this is why the prophecy reaches in its full bearing to the final judgment of the earth, when that judgment and call are to be fully accomplished. God consequently Himself delivers and saves His people, judging between sheep and sheep, and executing wrath against all those who have trodden them under foot. The judgment of the one absorbing empire does not form part of the prophecies of Ezekiel (this is found in Daniel), save so far as every oppressor and evil shepherd is judged (Ezek. 34). The connection of this empire with Israel in the last days will not be immediate. It will politically favour the Jews who do not own the Lord. What I here notice forms the key of the prophecy. Ezekiel speaks from the midst of Israel captive, and does not occupy himself with Judah, owned by itself in the land under the power of the Gentiles.}

I have already quoted the passages which shew that for Israel it is the deliverance from their former snares. The pretensions of man are overthrown (Ezek. 29:3-9), the spirit of dominion (Ezek. 31:10-14). The nothingness of the glory of man is shewn at the end of chapter 31, and of each judgment of chapter 32. We have already seen that the fate of Meshech is mentioned separately, perhaps in view of that which will happen to it in the last days, and which is announced farther on (Ezek. 39:5).

The object of Jehovah's judgments

It is important to remark one point in this series of prophecies, which commences with the judgment of Jerusalem, the centre of the former system of nations. They are executed with the object of making them all know Jehovah: only in Israel's case there is, besides this, the understanding and the special verification of prophecy. See Ezekiel 24:24-27, Israel; Ezekiel 25:5, 7, 11, Ammon and Moab; Ezekiel 25:15-17, especial vengeance on the Philistines; Ezekiel 26, Tyre; Ezekiel 28:22, Sidon; Ezekiel 29:19, Egypt; as also Ezekiel 30:26; Ezekiel 32:15. With respect to Edom (Ezek. 25:14), it is only said that Edom shall know the vengeance of Jehovah by means of Israel — a further proof that in certain respects this prophecy extends to the last days. These prophecies, then, furnish us in general with the manifestation of Jehovah's power, so as to make Him known to all by the judgments which He executed; already partially realised in the conquests of Nebuchadnezzar, but to be fully accomplished by-and-by in favour of Israel.

It will be remarked that, in Ezekiel 35:12 when Edom is again judged, it is only said, "Thou shalt know that I Jehovah have heard all thy blasphemies." But in verses 4, 9, it is said of Edom, "Thou shalt know" or "Ye shall know that I am Jehovah." So that this knowledge of Jehovah is by the judgment itself, not by any resulting spiritual knowledge of Him; for, when all the earth shall rejoice, Edom shall be made desolate. It will be through judgment that all the nations shall know that Jehovah is God. But when the judgment has been executed and all the earth shall rejoice in blessing, Edom will have only judgment. Compare Obadiah. Edom undergoes judgment by means of the mighty among the nations, but Israel

himself shall strike the final blow. We may see the two means of making Jehovah known in the case of Israel (Ezek. 24:24-27; 28:26; 34:27; 36:11). In the other cases it is by judgment.

Commercial glory and governmental pride of power absolutely judged

We have yet to observe that in the case of Tyre, commercial glory, and in the case of Egypt, governmental pride founded on power, are absolutely judged, cast down and destroyed without remedy (Ezek. 26:21; 27:36; 31:18). Compare Ezekiel 32:32. This has been literally fulfilled with respect to the continental Tyre, and the Egypt of the Pharaohs. We have seen a total destruction of Edom announced by Jehovah. That which characterised Edom was its implacable hatred to the people of God.

Chapter 33

An entirely new principle established — individual condition before God

In Ezekiel 33, in view of these judgments, which put His people on entirely new ground (for they were judged as Loammi, with the nations, and this is why the prophecy can look on to the last days, although the judgments had been but partial) — in view then of these judgments, God establishes an entirely new principle, namely, individual conduct as the ground of the dealings of God, in contrast with the consequences of national sin (v. 10, 11). Thus the door was still fully open to individual repentance founded on a testimony that applied individually, whatever the national judgment might be. The end to which the judgment applies is in contrast with the effect to be produced by it on the individual, and that in order to confirm the principles. Faith would not be shewn now by reckoning on the promises to Israel, or on the intervention of God in behalf of His people as in possession of His promises, for the people were judged; and the very thing that would have been faith, had it been the time of the promises, and that hereafter also will be faith, is but hardness of heart in the time of judgment (v. 24). Compare Isaiah 51:2, a passage often entirely misapplied. The little remnant in the latter days may trust in a God who had called out one man alone and had multiplied him; but such a thought on the part of the people, when God was cutting off the multitude of them because of their iniquities, would only cause the judgment to be more keenly felt. In this way of judgment on the iniquities of which they had been nationally guilty (and not by a blessing which presumption would snatch from God), they should know that Jehovah was God.

Chapter 34

Israel's leaders the evil shepherds; God's true and only Shepherd

The end of Jeremiah has given us an account of the fulfilment of Ezekiel's words; but all these judgments give room for the intervention of God in behalf of His people by means of sovereign grace accomplished in the Messiah. Still the evil lay in the shepherds, that is, in the kings and princes of Israel, who were not true shepherds (indeed there were none true); and the flock, diseased, scattered,

afflicted, and ill-treated, were a prey to their enemies. The shepherds devoured them, and neither protected nor cared for them. But Jehovah now points it out in order to say that He Himself would seek out His poor sheep, and would judge between sheep and sheep, and would deliver them from the mouth of those that devoured them,* and that He would feed them upon the mountains of Israel, and in fat pastures. He would raise up the true and only shepherd, David (that is, the well-beloved Messiah). Jehovah should be their God, and His servant David their prince. The covenant of peace should be re-established; full and secure blessing should be the abiding portion of the people of God, the house of Israel. There should be no more famine in their land, and the nations should no more devour them. Observe here the way in which Jehovah Himself delivers His sheep, without calling Himself their shepherd, and then raises up a plant of renown, the true David, as their shepherd. {* The thirty-third chapter having stated the great principles of God's dealings in the last days, namely, individual condition before God, Ezekiel 34 exhibits the conduct of their leaders: Jehovah judges the latter as having misled and oppressed His people; He discerns Himself "between cattle and cattle." Then in Ezekiel 35 Edom is judged (compare Isaiah 34). Here, in general, it is the effect, relating to all Israel ("these two countries"). In Ezekiel 36 is the moral renewing of all Israel, that they may judge their ways; in Ezekiel 37, the restoration of the people, as quickened by God in national resurrection; and at last (Ezek. 38 and 39) the judgment of the enemies of the people thus restored in peace, or rather, of the enemy (that is, Gog). All these things are connected with the relationship between Jehovah and His people Although He gives David as king, yet the Messiah is not named as having had relations with the people; for in fact this was only true of Judah. It is a general picture of the last days in their great results and their events, everything having its place in reference to all Israel, without giving a history of details.}

Chapter 35

God's condemnation of Edom

In Ezekiel 35 God decides the controversy between Edom and Israel, and condemns Mount Seir to perpetual desolation, because of the inveterate hatred of that people to Israel; and instead of delivering up Israel to Edom in the day that He chastises His people, it is Edom that shall bear the punishment of this hatred, when the whole earth shall rejoice. When God chastises His people, the world thinks to possess everything; whereas that chastisement is but the precursor of the world's judgment.

Chapter 36

God will sanctify His great Name before the heathen by His sanctifying grace to His people

Ezekiel 36 continues the same subject with reference to the blessing of Israel. The nations insulted Israel as a land whose ancient high places were their prey, and — as the spies had said — a land that devoured its inhabitants. God takes occasion from this to shew that He favours His people, and Jehovah

declares that He will restore peace and prosperity to the land and take away their reproach. Israel had defiled the land and profaned the name of Jehovah, and Jehovah had scattered them among the heathen. And even in this His name would be profaned through their vileness, because the heathen would say, "These are the people of Jehovah, and are gone forth out of his land." But Jehovah would intervene and sanctify His great name before the heathen, by bringing His people back from among them, and cleansing them from all their filthiness; taking away the hardness of their hearts, giving them His Spirit, causing them to walk in His statutes, planting them in the land which He had given to their fathers, owning them as His people, and being Himself their God. The reproach that the land devoured its inhabitants would then be evidently without foundation. God would multiply earthly blessings to His people. Jehovah's work should be evident to all men.

The necessity for new birth should not have surpised Nicodemus

It is principally to this passage (although not exclusively) that the Lord Jesus alludes in John 3, telling Nicodemus that He had spoken of earthly things, and that, as a master of Israel, he ought to have understood that this renewing of heart was necessary to the blessing of Israel in the earth. The truth of this, with regard to a Jew, ought not to surprise him, since it was a work of sovereignty in whomsoever should be born of God; and if Nicodemus did not understand the declaration of the prophets, with respect to the necessity of being born again for Israel's enjoyment of earthly things, how could he understand if Jesus spoke to him of heavenly things, for the introduction of which the death of the Son of man, His rejection by the Jews, was absolutely necessary?

Israel as a nation responsible to Jehovah

We may remark that this prophet speaks of the dealings of God with respect to Israel as a nation responsible to Jehovah, and never says anything of the first coming of Christ or of Israel's responsibility with regard to Him. This took place under the dominion of the Gentiles. Here Nebuchadnezzar is but a rod in the hand of Jehovah, and the times of the Gentiles are not considered. This is the reason why we find the judgment of the nations by Nebuchadnezzar connected with the events of the last days. The rejection of Christ by the Jews is therefore not mentioned here. It is Israel before Jehovah. This remark is important in order to understand Ezekiel (see preceding note).

Chapter 37

The dry bones: Israel gathered by the power of God

Ezekiel 37 reveals the definitive blessing of the people as a fact, without entering into any details of the events that terminate in this blessing. The dry bones of Israel, of the nation as a whole, are gathered together by the power of God. God accomplishes this work by His Spirit, but by His Spirit acting in power on His people to produce certain effects rather than in giving spiritual life (although it is not to be doubted that those who are blessed among the Jews will be spiritually quickened). The result of this intervention of God is that the dispersed of Israel, hitherto divided into two peoples, are gathered

together in the earth, reunited under one Head, as one nation. It is the resurrection of the nation, which was really dead and buried. But God opens their graves, and places them again in their land restored to life as a nation. The fact of their division before this operation of God is recognised. But the result of the operation is Israel in their unity as a people. One king should reign over them. This, under God's hand, is the result of all their iniquity, and of the devices of the enemies who had carried them into captivity. David (that is, Christ) should be their king. They should be thoroughly cleansed by God Himself. They should walk in His statutes and His judgments, and dwell for ever in their land. The sanctuary of God should be in their midst for evermore; His tabernacle, His dwelling-place, should be among them, He their God and they His people. The heathen should know that Jehovah sanctified Israel, when His sanctuary should be there for ever. It is the full national blessing of Israel from the Lord Jehovah.

Chapters 38 and 39

Gog's assault on the land and its result

Gog, not fearing Jehovah, seeks to take possession of the land. He has no thought that Jehovah is there. His pride blinds him.

Ezekiel's subject: Jehovah's judgments on the earth

It is very important to remark that Ezekiel speaks neither of the first nor the second coming of Christ, nor of the circumstances of the Jews in connection with the empire of the Gentiles. The latter only appear as instruments performing the will of God. The prophet brings Jehovah and Israel into the scene. He presents Christ indeed, but as being there already and in the character of David. Jehovah raises up for them a plant of renown. His coming is not the question. The judgments of Jehovah upon the earth make Him known to the nations and to Israel (to the latter His blessings also). The nations learn through these, a point of capital importance in God's ways, that Israel went into captivity because of their sins, and not because their God was like the idols of the heathen. But in all the ways of God thus presented, not only is the coming of Christ not mentioned, but it has even no place. It belongs to another series of thoughts and revelations of the Spirit of God — another order of events.

The connection of Ezekiel 36 to 39

It is well also to observe that Ezekiel 36 and 37, and the two following ones taken together, are not consecutive; but each of the first two by itself, and the last two, taken together as a whole, treat of distinct subjects, each subject being complete, and presenting the introduction of Israel's blessing in connection with the subject treated, and closing with the assurance that it will be final and perpetual. The subject of all these prophecies is the land, and the blessings of God upon the land of Israel. This land, which belonged to Jehovah, He would not have defiled. He drives out Israel from it in judgment; and when He has cleansed the people, He makes the nations, as well as Israel, understand His ways in this respect. He acts in full grace towards His people He makes it known that they are His people, that

He will be sanctified, and that He is sanctified, in their midst.

God's final judgment on Gog

I think, then, that Gog is the end of all the dealings of God with respect to Israel, and that God brings up this haughty power in order to manifest on earth, by a final judgment, His dealings with Israel and with the Gentiles, and to plant His blessing, His sanctuary, and His glory in the midst of Israel (none of the people being henceforth left in exile afar from their land).

The manifestation of God's government on earth

Besides the numerous verses in which it is said, "And they shall know that I am Jehovah," the following passages may be referred to, which will shew the leading thought in those declarations and judgments of God, namely, the manifestation of His government on the earth — a government making manifest the true character of God in His rule, and securing its demonstration in the world, in spite of the unfaithfulness of His people; and that, in grace as well as in holiness, Ezekiel 36:19-23, 36; 39:7, 23, 24, 28. With respect to Israel, see Ezekiel 34:30; to the enemy, Ezekiel 35:12; 37:28.

The only subject of the book

That which I have just said of Gog supposes that all the events which relate to the coming of the Son of man are omitted in the writings of this prophet — which I believe to be the case. The Book treats only of the governmental ways of God on the earth, of Jehovah in Israel. The power designated by "Gog" is that of the north, outside of the territory of the beasts in Daniel. I doubt not that the right translation would be "Prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal," as learned men have remarked. Cush and Phut were on the Euphrates, as well as on the Nile. Persia is known. Togarmah is the north-east of Asia Minor. The audaciousness of this king causes the wrath of Jehovah to break forth.

Jesus suffering and reigning as David before ruling as Solomon

I will add, in order to facilitate the establishment of the connection of this with other passages, that I doubt not Jesus will reign in the character of David before assuming that of Solomon. He suffered as David, driven away by the jealousy of Saul. The remnant will pass through this in principle. This is the key to the Book of Psalms. He will reign as David, Israel being blessed and accepted, but all their enemies not yet destroyed. And, finally, He will reign as Solomon, that is to say, as Prince of peace. Many passages, such as Micah 5, several chapters in Zechariah, Jeremiah 51:20-21, Ezekiel 25:14, speak of this time, in which Israel, already reconciled and acknowledged and at peace within, shall be the instrument for executing Jehovah's judgments without (compare Isa. 11:10-14).

God making Himself known in Israel characteristic of Ezekiel's prophecies

All, then, that related to the destruction of the empires which are the subject of Daniel's prophecies has no place in the prophecies of Ezekiel; nor that which takes place in order to put Israel again in relation with God; nor the consequences to the Jews of their rejection of Christ. These subjects will be found elsewhere, as in Daniel, Zechariah, and more generally in Isaiah. Here God makes Himself known in Israel. Gog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, falls upon the mountains of Israel, and Jehovah makes Himself known in the eyes of many nations (Ezek. 38:21-23). The judgment shall reach the land of Gog, and the isles (Ezek. 39:6). The name of Jehovah shall be known in Israel, and the heathen shall know that Jehovah, the Holy One, is in Israel (v. 7). And, the glory of Jehovah being thus manifested in the midst of the nations, Israel from this day forth shall know that it is Jehovah Himself who is their God, and the nations shall know that it was the iniquity of Israel that brought judgment upon them, and not that Jehovah had failed either in power or in the stability of His counsels (v. 22-24). In a word, Jehovah and His government should be fully known in Israel, and by means of this people in the world; and from that time God would no more hide His face from them. His Spirit should be poured out upon His people. Verses 25-29 recapitulate the dealings of God towards them for the establishment of His government, and to make Himself known among them.

Chapters 40 to 43

God's sanctuary in the midst of His people re-established in holiness

The remaining part of the prophecy is the establishment of His sanctuary in the midst of His people. The reader will perceive that we find in these last chapters a revelation of the same kind as that given to Moses for the tabernacle, and to David for the temple — only that in this case the details are preserved in the writings given to the people by inspiration, as a testimony for the time to come, and to conscience in all times. God takes an interest in His people. He will reestablish His sanctuary among men. Meantime the testimony of this has been given to the people to bring them under the responsibility which this good-will of God towards them involved. For the prophet was commanded to tell the house of Israel all that he had seen; and he did so. When the dimensions of the different parts of the house have been given, the glory of Jehovah fills the house, in the vision, as happened historically at the dedication of the tabernacle and of the temple.

Ezekiel 43:7 proclaims that the house, which is the throne and the footstool of Jehovah, should no more be defiled by profane things. The prophet was then to declare that, if Israel renounced their unfaithfulness, Jehovah would return to dwell there. Thus the people are placed at all times under this responsibility. The prophet was to shew the house to Israel that they might repent; and, if they repented, he was to explain it to them in detail. And it is this which takes place at the end. The ordinances of the house were to be shewn them, if they humbled themselves; and in view of this the prophet announces all that was to be done for the cleansing and the consecration of the altar, in order that the regular service might be performed.

Chapter 44

Jehovah's return to His house: the throne of God on earth: a Prince raised up

Ezekiel 44 makes known the fact that Jehovah is returned to His house, and the memorial of His having done so is preserved in that the door by which He entered is to remain for ever shut. The Prince alone (for God will raise up a Prince in Israel) is to enter through it — to sit before Jehovah. We have seen that this prophet always contemplates Israel on their own ground, as an earthly people in relation with the throne of God on the earth (compare Zech. 12:7-10). Finally God maintains the holiness of His house against all strangers, and even against the Levites who had forsaken it. The family of Zadok is established in the priesthood, and directions are given to keep it from all profanation.

Chapters 45 and 46

The apportionment of the land: provision for the offerings

Ezekiel 45. The portion of the priests in the land is assigned them — close to that of the sanctuary. The portion of the Levites was to adjoin that of the priests, and then came the possession of the city and its suburbs. That which remained of the breadth of the land was for the Prince and for the inheritance of His children, in order that the people should no longer be oppressed. All the rest of the land was for the people. Provision is also made for the daily offerings, and for those of the Sabbath. The other appointed offerings were to be made by the Prince.

The perfect character of worship in the millennial day

Some details require one or two remarks. The cleansing of the sanctuary commences the year. It is no longer an atonement at the end of seven months to take away the defilements that have been accumulating. The year opens with an already accomplished cleansing. Afterwards, in order that all may have communion with the sufferings of the Paschal Lamb, an offering is made on the seventh day of the month for every one that erreth, and every one that is simple (v. 20). During the feast they offered seven bullocks instead of two. The character of worship will be perfect. The sense of Christ's acceptance as the burnt-offering will be perfect in that day. The feast of Pentecost is omitted — a circumstance of great significance, for this feast characterises our present position. Not that the Spirit will not be given in the world to come, when Christ shall establish His kingdom. But this gift is not that which, connecting us with a heavenly Christ and the Father in Christ's absence, characterises that period as it does the present time. For Christ will be present.

The position of Israel: the worship of the Prince and people

We have observed that the prophet sees everything in a point of view connected with Israel. Thus the remembrance of redemption, the passover, the basis of all, and the enjoyment of rest celebrated at the feast of the tabernacles, will characterise the position of Israel before God. The two feasts are celebrated in the recognition of the full value of the burnt offering presented to God. Another

circumstance which distinguishes the worship of this millennial day is, that the two feasts which are types of that period are marked out in the worship — the Sabbath, and the new moon, rest and re-establishment, Israel appearing anew in the world. The inner gate on the side of the east was open on that day, and the Prince worshipped at the very threshold of the gate and the people before the gate (Ezek. 46). The other days it was shut. They stood thus before Jehovah in the consciousness of the rest which God had given to Israel and of His grace in again manifesting His people in the light. Nevertheless it still remains true that neither the people nor the Prince entered within. Those who are the most blessed on the earth in that day of blessing will never have that access into God's presence which we have, by the Spirit, through the veil. Pentecost belongs to, and links itself with, the rending of the veil; and gives us to walk in all liberty in the light, as God Himself is in the light, having entered into the holy place by the new and living way which He has consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh.

The Prince entered by the outer door on the side of the east, and he went out by the same door. In the solemn feasts, the people went in by the north gate and came out by the south gate, and the Prince in their midst. When he went in alone, as a voluntary worshipper, he entered and retired again by the eastern gate. These ordinances, while giving remarkable honour to the Prince, in connection with the glory of God, who gave him his place among the people, equally secured that which follows (v. 16-18) of the brotherly and benevolent relations between him and the people of God, and took away all opportunities of oppression.

Chapters 47 and 48

The life-giving waters from the sanctuary

The last two chapters do not require any lengthened remarks. The waters that issue from the sanctuary represent the life-giving power that proceeds from the throne of God, flowing through His temple, and healing the Dead Sea, the abiding token of judgment. The waters abound in fish, the trees that grow beside them are filled with fruit, the marshes alone remain under the curse — they are "given to salt." The blessing of that day is real and abundant, but not complete. The land is divided between the tribes in a new manner, by straight lines drawn from east to west. The portion for the sanctuary and for the city, or the 25,000 square reeds, are situated next to the seventh tribe, beginning from the north. The name of the city thenceforth shall be "Jehovah is there." Compare, for the waters that flow from the temple, Joel 3:18; Zechariah 14:8 — passages that refer to the same period.

The main features of chapters 47 and 48

It appears that the two places pointed out to the fishermen as a boundary were the two extremities of the Dead Sea (we may compare Gen. 14:7; 2 Chron. 20:2; and Isa. 15:8). The main features in the whole passage are the re-establishment of Israel, but on new grounds and blessing, analogous to that of paradise (an image borrowed from this prophecy in the Apocalypse);* but, after all, with the reserve that this blessing did not absolutely remove all evil, as will be the case in the eternal ages. {* When I

say "borrowed," it is not that the Spirit of God has not given us an original image in the Apocalypse: one has but to read it to be convinced of the contrary. But Old Testament imagery is constantly employed in the descriptions there given — only in such a manner as to apply it to heavenly things, a circumstance that makes it much easier to understand the book by helping us to enter into its real character through its analogy with the Old Testament.}

Millennial blessing not that of eternal ages: the name of the city

There is a powerful and abiding source of blessing which greatly surmounts the evil, and almost effaces it; nevertheless it is not entirely taken away. Still the name of the city, of the seat of power, that which characterises it, is "Jehovah is there" — Jehovah, that great King, the Creator of all things, and the Head of His people Israel.