

The Historical Testimony of the Prophet Zephaniah.

BY PROF. H. FERGUSON.

THE prophecy of Zephaniah is stated (i. 1) to have been uttered in the reign of Josiah the son of Amon, King of Judah. The contents of the prophecy are entirely in accordance with this statement, and the authenticity of the book has never been questioned. To decide exactly to what period of the reign of Josiah it belongs, is more difficult. It was evidently, however, written before (but not long before) the destruction of Nineveh (ii. 13-15), which event took place, according to the most generally received chronology, B.C. 606, some five years after Josiah's death. From the expression "remnant of Baal" (i. 4), and from the general tone of zeal for Jehovah, and reproof and reproach for his enemies, we may conclude that it was written after the beginning of the reformation of Josiah, in the twelfth year of his reign; ¹ and probably after the discovery of the book of the Law, in his eighteenth year. It is therefore in the last nineteen years of Josiah's reign that we place the date of this prophecy; and as the "King's children" ² are denounced in it, it is most probable that it was not delivered until towards the end of this period, as otherwise these would have been too young to be responsible for their actions, or to merit such bitter reproof and denunciation, since at the time of the discovery of the Law, Jehoiakim was only twelve years old, Jehoahaz only ten, while Zedekiah was not even born. We cannot be far wrong if we put the date of the prophecy at or near the twenty-fifth year of Josiah (B.C. 617-616).

¹ So Eichhorn, Bertholdt, Rosenmüller, Jahn, Bleek, Hitzig, Keil, Delitzsch. De Wette (Schrader) considers it to belong to the first years of Josiah, before the Reformation began; so also Ewald and Hävernick.

² On this point the majority of modern commentators are inclined to consider that children of some former king are meant; but the reasons adduced are not convincing, and there is no clear example of such a use of the phrase (II. Chron. xxii. 11, cited by Hitzig, does not seem to me to sustain his point).

Of the prophet himself nothing is known. He is described as the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hizkiah (*i. q.*, Hezekiah). From this genealogy some have been inclined to consider him of royal blood, and a descendant of Hezekiah, King of Judah, the great-grandfather of Josiah. This can, however, be nothing more than a conjecture. More probably he was of priestly family, perhaps related to that Zephaniah, the son of Maaseiah, who was "second priest" at the time of the destruction of the Temple (II. Kings xxv. 18; Jer. xxi. 1, *al.*). For other instances of the name, all in the tribe of Levi, see I. Chron. vi. 36; Zech. vi. 10, 14.

In his prophecy, Zephaniah foretells the sure coming of the Day of Jehovah; *i. e.*, of Jehovah's triumph and vengeance. When it shall come, Jerusalem shall be destroyed and the land depopulated. The Philistines, Moab and Ammon, shall be utterly destroyed, and their land eventually possessed, by the remnant of Judah. The Ethiopians also shall be slain by the sword. Assyria shall be destroyed, and Nineveh be made a wilderness. But the prophecy is not without its brighter side and note of promise, and foretells that, after Jerusalem shall have been punished, a remnant shall still be left which shall return, and shall be richly blessed, and shall be made a name and a praise among all people. Such, very briefly epitomized, are the contents of the prophecy.

But the book also bears witness to the condition of the people at the time it was written, and we may find in it some facts in regard to the social and religious condition of the people at the time of Josiah's Reformation, not elsewhere given with equal explicitness. The writer was an ardent supporter of Jehovah, and as such was doubtless in thorough sympathy with the band of reformers, who were struggling against heathenism and idolatry, and the attendant and inseparable immorality. Very probably he was joined to them, also, by ties of blood; if of the royal seed, being related to Josiah; if, as is likely, his grandfather Amariah was the priest of that name in the reign of Hezekiah (II. Chron. xxxi. 15), he was nearly related to Hilkiyah and the other priestly reformers. It must always be remembered that Josiah's reformation was not at all a popular movement, but was carried with a high hand by the zealous and enthusiastic king, only to give place to a renewal of the former indifference and idolatry after his death at Hadad Rimmon. It is too much to say, as Wellhausen does ("Encyclop. Britt.," art. *Israel*), that the people observed the covenant during Josiah's lifetime. Such might be considered to have been the case were the books of Kings and Chronicles our

only sources of information, as the annalist, carried away by the last gleam of prosperity to the people, is oblivious to the darker shadows that were cast upon it. But in the prophecies of Zephaniah and Jeremiah, making all necessary allowance for the different standpoint of historian and preacher, we cannot fail to find unmistakable proof that the covenant was not adhered to even while Josiah was alive, but that it was openly as well as secretly violated by all classes among the people. The Hebrews, or rather the Jews, at that day were syncretists in their religion; it might have been said of them, as of their neighbors in Samaria, that they feared Jehovah and worshiped graven images at the same time; the priests were too often like Urijah in the reign of Ahaz, an hundred years before, pliant instruments of the will of a despotic king, and the prophets, with a few exceptions, made a trade of their prophetic powers, and were indifferent to the truth or falsity of their utterances. But a kernel of life was yet left in the nation; as in Israel in the days of Elijah, so now there were some faithful men who had not bowed the knee to Baal or given in their adhesion to the fashionable indifference or toleration; and now, having gained to their side the young and enthusiastic king, who had wished to serve Jehovah when he only knew him as the "God of David his father" (II. Chron. xxxiv. 3), and who now was devoted to His cause, they enlisted all his youthful vigor and all his unlimited royal power in a re-establishment of the worship of Jehovah, in greater glory than had been ever known. Great repairs were undertaken in the Temple, which had been alternately neglected by the better and pillaged by the worse of the various monarchs who had preceded Josiah, from the days of Rehoboam down. There was, indeed, a strange condition of affairs, the wrong and incongruity of which does not seem to have been fully appreciated even by the servants of Jehovah themselves. In the Temple Solomon had built to Jehovah, and which had been most solemnly dedicated to His glory, were contained at this time (II. Kings xxiii. 4, ff.) vessels made for Baal, and for the Asherah, and for all the host of heaven; and more than all this, even a "grove," or Asherah, a symbolical representation of the female divinity of the Canaanites. At the door of the Temple stood the horses consecrated to the sun, and chariots of the sun. By the side of the Temple were houses or stalls where male prostitutes plied their horrid trade, a part of the religious worship of the land. In the very courts of the Temple were altars for all the host of heaven, which Manasseh had made, and on the top of the upper chamber of Ahaz, other altars, which had been placed there by former kings of Judah. Such was

the condition of the Temple of Jehovah when the work of restoration began. And as it was defiled with these incongruous additions, so had it been despoiled of much that had made it rich and beautiful. The gold doors of the Temple, and the golden overlaid pillars, and all the silver in the Lord's house, had been given by Hezekiah to Sennacherib, as a bribe to purchase his favor (II. Kings xviii. 15, 16). Ahaz, the father of Hezekiah, had already sacrificed for a like purpose the borders of the bases, and the brazen oxen that held the brazen sea, and the "covert for the Sabbath," and the King's entry (II. Kings xvi. 17, 18). (The silver and gold of the Temple seem to have been commonly used for this purpose in times of need. Cf. I. Kings xv. 18; II. Kings xii. 18, xvi. 8, xviii. 15.) The Temple had been twice plundered by a foreign enemy: once by Shishak, King of Egypt, in the reign of Rehoboam (I. Kings xiv. 25, 26), and once by Jehoash, King of Israel, in the reign of Amaziah the son of Joash (II. Kings xiv. 14). It is true that devout monarchs had from time to time restored the building and lavished their treasures upon it (I. Kings xv. 15; II. Kings xii. 4-16, xv. 35), but the dilapidations had been far greater than the repairs, and its beauty and glory must have been greatly diminished.

And outside the Temple walls, the condition was a strange one for the capital city of the people of Jehovah, who had remained faithful to Him, and to the central sanctuary of His worship, when the Ten Tribes had withdrawn from their allegiance to the House of David. Idolatrous priests (כמרים) burned incense in the high places in the cities of Judah, and in the places round about Jerusalem; others burned incense to Baal, to the sun and to the moon, and to the planets and to all the host of heaven. In the valley of the children of Hinnom, immediately without the city wall, men made their children pass through the fire to Molech; and in the Mount of Olives were high places Solomon had built, where the worship of Ashtoreth and Chemosh and Milcom (probably identical with Molech) was carried on continually. And, as a hundred years before, in the days of Isaiah, so now were to be found, in both Judah and Jerusalem, workers with familiar spirits and wizards (II. Kings xxiii. 5, 10, 13, 24).

But, during the repairing of the House of Jehovah, Hilkiyah, the High Priest, made a discovery of momentous importance, which at once enlarged the scope and changed the character of the reformation (II. Kings xxii. 8). He found in the Temple, where it had lain

for ages, unnoticed and unheeded, if not unknown, the Book of the Law (**ספר התורה**).¹

This Sepher hat'Orah was in all probability, judging from the effects produced, a copy of what is now known as the Book of Deuteronomy, or, at the least, of that portion of it that contains the covenant and the blessings and curses.

Some Scriptural critics have insinuated that Hilkiah only found what he had himself hidden, and that the book now found was a clumsy forgery, which yet imposed upon the king and the people. The view would be hardly deserving of notice, owing to its extreme improbability, had it not been put forward by men of unquestioned ability. Assuming, for the sake of argument, that Hilkiah and Shaphan and the prophets of Jehovah, the representatives and exponents of morality, and of morality as a part of religion, would be capable of such a fraud in the name of Jehovah, yet it is incredible that a fraud, that affected as this did so many and so diverse vested interests, should have been acquiesced in without resistance by those with whose long-established privileges it interfered. There was, as we shall see, a tacit resistance to the reformation, but no sign that the opponents of reform considered that they had been imposed on by a pretended document. The book evidently awakened old memories, and this was the secret of its power. Can we believe that, in the age of the highest bloom of Hebrew literature, there were not scribes among the opponents of Jehovah, as well as among His adherents, of sufficient literary ability to detect such a flagrant imposition as the critics would have us believe was practised upon them?

The effect upon the mind of the king was very great. He rent his clothes, and sent messengers to inquire of Jehovah concerning the words of the book; and, in spite of the words of doom, spoken in reply through the prophetess Huldah, he at once set about the work of reformation. This was, externally, thorough and sweeping. He removed all the abominations from the Temple and from Jerusalem and from the cities of Judah, going even outside the limits of his own kingdom, as far as Bethel and the cities of Samaria, upon the same

¹ The absence of the article from **ספר** does not warrant the translation of the phrase as simply "a law book." It is the universal rule that the definiteness of the absolute noun extends to the construct noun with which it is connected. Thus to take an instance from this very passage **בבית יהוה** is not to be translated "in a house of Jehovah," but, as the construct word is rendered definite by the word that it limits, "in *the* house of Jehovah."

errand. After this was done, the Passover was celebrated in Jerusalem, according "as it is written in the book of this Covenant," in a manner that had not been seen in all the days of the kings of Israel, nor of the kings of Judah, nor since the days of the Judges. After this, Josiah's reign lasted for thirteen years, in which it is recorded of him that, "like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to Jehovah with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the laws of Moses; neither after him arose any like him" (II. Kings xxiii. 21-25). But his zeal led him into imprudently opposing Pharaoh Necho, King of Egypt, and he was slain at the battle of Megiddo; and after his death, although the worship of Jehovah continued, the abuses he had removed were in great measure brought back; and his reforms seem to have been forgotten except by the few faithful "servants of Jehovah," who kept their faith alive during the gloomy years of trouble and distress that followed, and who were to be the centre of life for the people in their captivity.

To gain a correct idea of the magnitude of the changes that the reform brought about, we must notice the length of time that the objectionable practices had been in existence. The "Grove," or Asherah figure, had been in the Temple of Jehovah certainly since the reign of Manasseh (II. Kings xxi. 3), at the very least reckoning twenty years, and possibly seventy-five; and the Asherah worship had been common in Judah since the reign of Rehoboam (B.C. 975-958), a period of three hundred and fifty years (I. Kings xiv. 23, xv. 13; II. Kings xviii. 4). The altars of Ahaz had been in the Temple over a hundred years (II. Kings xvi. 10-16). The worship of Baal was probably practised by the aboriginal Canaanite population of the land, but had been introduced from the neighboring kingdom of Israel as early as the reign of Jehoram, who married the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, and who reigned in Judah B.C. 893-885 (II. Kings viii. 16-18); and, like the worship of the Asherah, it seems never to have been eradicated, though the best of the kings did not encourage it, and at this time it seems to have lost somewhat of its ancient popularity. The Sodomites are mentioned in the reign of Rehoboam (I. Kings xiv. 24), and as having been taken away out of the land by Asa (I. Kings xv. 12), whose reformation, which was, like that of Josiah, short-lived, was like it conducted on the lines marked out in Deuteronomy. The worship of the sun, and of the host of heaven, was practised by Manasseh (II. Kings xxi. 3) and probably by Ahaz, and the horses and chariots of the sun are mentioned as

having been the gifts of the "kings of Judah" (II. Kings xxiii. 11), as if the practice had been of long continuance. The worship of Jehovah on the high places had been practised certainly since the days of the Judges, and there is no record of its having been condemned by any recognized authority until the reign of Hezekiah. The statement in II. Chron. xiv. 3, 5, and xvii. 6, in regard to Asa and Jehoshaphat, are contradicted not only by the express statements in Kings, but by other statements of the chronicler himself (*cf.* II. Chron. xv. 17; I. Kings xv. 14; II. Chron. xx. 33; I. Kings xxii. 43).

The worship upon various high places seems to have been allowed and approved by the religious leaders of the people (I. Kings iii. 2). It was certainly practised by Samuel (I. Sam. ix. 12, 13, 14, 19, 25; x. 8; xi. 14, 15, *et al.*), by David (II. Sam. xxiv. 18-25), and even by Solomon (I. Kings iii. 3, 4); and these high places were never removed, according to the testimony of the Book of Kings, until the reign of Hezekiah, and were restored again immediately after his death. Their removal was at that time evidently a very unpopular measure, and we find Rabshakeh, the general of Sennacherib, making use of it as an argument to induce the people of Jerusalem to rebel against Hezekiah and make submission to his master (I. Kings xviii. 22, 25; II. Chron. xxxii. 10-12; Is. xxxvi. 7).¹

The high places of Chemosh, Ashtoreth, and Milcom had been standing in the midst of the people since the days of Solomon, some

¹ It would be beyond the purpose of this article to go to any great length into the question of the worship upon the high places. The considerations mentioned seem to conclusively prove the continued existence of the practice from the earliest times. A very ancient law (Ex. xx. 24-26) gave directions as to the way in which altars were to be made, and the prohibitions in Deut. xii. might easily have been understood to apply only to those high places which had been defiled by idolatrous worship. In the unsettled period of the Judges, attendance at a central sanctuary must at times have been impossible, though from I. Sam. i. 3, we see that it was practised. When the ark was in the hands of the Philistines, the sanctuary had lost its most sacred symbol, and it was not until the reign of David that anything like a central sanctuary again appears. It was most natural, then, that, notwithstanding the commands recorded in Deut. xii. had been given before the people crossed the Jordan, they should have been forgotten. Talmudic writers affirm that the law upon this subject did not apply until the Temple was built at Jerusalem. Even then the law could not have been generally or commonly known, as we find no sign that Jehoiada the priest, who was supreme during the minority of Joash, ever attempted to put down the worship, although he brought about the restoration of the Temple at Jerusalem and a revival of the worship and service of Jehovah (II. Kings xi., xii). *V.* article "Höhe," in Riehm's *Handwörterbuch d. Biblischen Altertums*.

four hundred years, as long a time as from the discovery of America until the present day; but they seem to have been regarded as foreign chapels, which did not particularly concern the people of the land. Hence we may see that what Josiah did, in removing all these so long established institutions, was little short of an entire revolution, and was effected against the will of a very influential portion of the people, if not of an actual numerical majority. Jehovah was indeed the national God, but Baal and Asherah were the favorite divinities of a large part of the people, and had been the divinities of the Canaanites, the original inhabitants of the land, from whom the children of Israel had adopted many beliefs and customs. The Temple at Jerusalem was, indeed, recognized as the special throne of Jehovah, but the people were accustomed to their sacrifices in their own towns, or at the neighboring sanctuaries, and did not willingly yield to the demand of the more earnest worshippers of Jehovah, that the central sanctuary should be the only place where sacrifice should be offered. Accordingly, we find that when the movement lost the support and prestige of the royal power, it collapsed, and was not able to accomplish its purposes until the rigorous process of natural selection had picked out from the mass of the captive Judæans those few who were willing to return to their own land, and to establish there the commonwealth of Jehovah, and to live in obedience to His laws. The majority of the people either perished, or, like the ten tribes of Israel, were content to remain in the land of their exile, and to a great extent conformed to heathenism; but the few, in whose hearts the leaven of the true faith in Jehovah and His righteousness had worked, returned, and established for the first time, in the full sense of the term, a commonwealth based expressly upon the detailed requirements of the Law of Moses.

In the prophecy of Zephaniah we find recorded several facts that will assist us to a fuller understanding of this period, some of which are not directly stated elsewhere. In ch. i. 4-6 we read: "I will also stretch out my hand upon Judah and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and I will cut off (1) the remnant of Baal from this place, and (2) the name of the Chemarim with (3) the priests, and (4) them that worship the host of heaven upon the housetops, and them (5) that worship and swear allegiance to Jehovah, and (or *yet*) swear by Malcham (*i.g.*, Milcom, Molech), and (6) those that are turned back from Jehovah, and (7) those who have not sought Jehovah, nor inquired for him."

Here we see that (1) vengeance is proclaimed against the remnant

of Baal (*cf.* II. Kings xxiii. 4), an expression which, though sometimes considered to indicate that this form of idolatry was not the leading or principal one, as in Israel under Ahab, but was an old worship which yet had some adherents in Jerusalem, yet more probably indicates that at the time of the prophet's utterance, in spite of Josiah's strongest measures, there were still left some remnant who remained faithful to their idolatrous worship. (2) The Chemarim are mentioned in II. Kings xxiii. 5 as being the priests whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense in the high places in the cities of Judah and in the places round about Jerusalem. The word is an Aramaic one, and is, in Syriac, the common one for priest. In Hebrew it is used always in a bad sense of priests of a religion other than that of Jehovah. *Cf.* Hosea x. 5 (*cf. per contra* Keil *in loco*).¹ They are here clearly distinguished from (3) the Cohanim, by whom are meant the Levitical priests of the high places, who were degraded from their office, yet allowed to eat of the hallowed food of the Sanctuary (II. Kings xxiii. 8, 9). These were worshippers of Jehovah; the Chemarim, on the other hand, were probably priests of images. Both Chemarim and Cohanim are threatened with destruction. (4) Those who worship the "host of heaven" are also denounced (*cf.* II. Kings xxiii. 4, 5, 11). (5) "Those who swear allegiance to Jehovah, yet swear by Malcham" (their king). In the Hebrew there is an evident contrast between the expression "swear to" (נִשְׁבַּע לֵ) and "swear by" (נִשְׁבַּע בְּ), and the entire force of the passage is lost if we omit to distinguish between them, as in done in the A. V. The persons denounced under this title are evidently priests of Jehovah, who, in spite of their pretended allegiance to Him, are, in reality, believers in and worshippers of Molech. (It is possible also to consider the passage as referring to those who made their king's (מַלְכָם) will the measure of their devotion, who, in order to please Josiah, had taken the covenant with Jehovah, but who were ready to apostasize should that be the pleasure of his successors. Such men have existed in all ages of the world, and were plentiful at the period under consideration, as is shown both by what Josiah was able to accomplish and also by what he failed to do.) (6, 7) The next two classes include all opponents of Jehovah among the people, viz., those who have been His worshippers, and who have forsaken Him, and those who have always

¹ The word literally means *dark robed, clad in mourning*, thus contrasting strongly with the white robes of the Levitical Priests and the gorgeous vestments of the High Priest.

lived in heathenism and indifference, "them that are turned back from Jehovah," *i.e.*, those who have relapsed into idolatry, and "those that have not sought Jehovah, nor enquired of (A. V. *for*) Him." "Seeking Jehovah" means to worship Him, to turn to Him especially with prayer and supplication. *Cf.* Ex. xxxiii. 7; II. Chron. xx. 4; Ps. xl. 17, lxix. 7, cv. 3; Is. li. 1. **דַּרְשׁ אֶת יְהוָה**, which should here be rendered "enquire of Jehovah," not "enquire for," is a very common expression, and means simply to seek Jehovah, to go to Him, and have recourse to Him for aid. *Cf.* II. Chron. xvi. 12; Deut. iv. 29; Ps. xxxiv. 5, lxxxviii. 34; Lam. iii. 25, *et al.* It is often used to denote the habitually pious, and is then equivalent to *worship* or *adore*. *V.* Ps. xiv. 2, ix. 11, xxii. 7, xxxiv. 11; Is. lviii. 2, *et al.*

In face of an opposition, that was evidently murmuring loudly, if not actually complaining, in regard to customs which, from their standpoint, were innovations, the prophet continues: "Hold thy peace at the presence of Adonai Jehovah, for the day of Jehovah is at hand; for Jehovah hath prepared a sacrifice, He hath bid His guests. And it shall come to pass in the day of Jehovah's sacrifice, that I will punish (8) the princes and (9) the king's children, and (10) all such as are clothed with strange apparel."

He foretells, in other words, that when the day of vengeance comes, these, who are at present escaping punishment, will receive their deserts. (8) First among these come the princes (**יְשִׁרִים**). These were the high officials of the kingdom, men of station and influence, and generally connected with the court. *Cf.* II. Sam. xviii. 5; I. Kings iv. 2; Job xxix. 9, xxxiv. 19; Is. xxx. 4; Jer. xxvi. 11 sq., xxxvii. 14 sq., *et al.* They seem to have formed a hereditary aristocracy in Judah and Jerusalem, and to have been divided upon the subject of religion. In the accounts given in Kings and Chronicles of reformation, we have no mention of any opposition. It is said the people "stood to the covenant," *i.e.*, "consented to it." Nothing in regard to the attitude of the nobles is thus recorded. From this passage, however, we learn that there was a powerful, if not an active opposition, and may understand how easily the good work became undone after the influence of the royal favor was removed. In the reign of Jehoiakim we find the "Sarim" preserving Jeremiah from the ignorant rage of the priests and people. This, however, does not show that they were upon the side of Jehovah, but rather the contrary, as the priests and people were, on that occasion, attacking Jeremiah because they considered him a traitor to Jehovah. On the other hand, when Urijah, the son of Shemaiah, of Kirjath Jearim (possibly one of their own

number), repeated Jeremiah's prophecy, we find the princes co-operating with the king to put him to death, and also learn that it was only by the kind offices of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, that Jeremiah escaped a similar fate (Jer. xxvi.). In Jer. xxxvi. the princes seem to have formed a council for the transaction of public business, and to have met in the "scribe's chamber" in the king's house, and to have considered that they were obliged to take cognizance of Jeremiah's book, which had been read by Barach. The majority of the princes, on this occasion, were against Jehovah; only Delaiah, the son of Shemaiah (perhaps brother to the dead Urijah), and Gemariah, the son of Shaphan (the brother of the Ahikam, who had, four years before, befriended Jeremiah), and Elnathan, the son of Achbor (who, on the former occasion, had been the instrument of the purposes of the impious king), only these three seem to have been touched in their consciences by the words of the prophet speaking in Jehovah's name. All the princes, however, seem, as in the previous case, to have had some personal regard for Jeremiah, and sent him warning to hide himself from the king's anger.

In the reign of Zedekiah, the princes appear to have deteriorated in character. This may be explained by the fact that the best of them had been carried captive with Jehoiachin (Jer. xxiv. 1-7). We read that they beat and imprisoned Jeremiah on suspicion of being about to desert to the Chaldeans (Jer. xxxvii. 13-15). When Zedekiah had given him some degree of liberty, they persuaded him to give orders for his death; and when the weak king yielded to their demands, they cast the prophet into the dungeon of Malchiah, into the mire (Jer. xxxviii.).

When Zedekiah proclaimed the emancipation of all Jewish slaves, the princes only pretended compliance, and afterwards re-enslaved all their former bondmen and bondwomen (Jer. xxxiv.). Finally, Ishmael, of the seed royal, and ten of the princes of the king with him, assassinated Gedaliah, the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, whom Nebuchadnezzar had made governor over the land (Jer. xli.). We may notice that Shaphan,—the scribe in Josiah's reign,—and most of his descendants, seem to have been faithful adherents of Jehovah (see, for a probable exception, Ezekiel viii. 11).

Shaphan, it will be remembered, was the person to whom Hilkiah the priest first communicated the news of the discovery of the Book of the Law (II. Kings xxii.), and he was, undoubtedly, among the leading reformers. The majority of the princes, however, appear to have been irreligious, not caring very much either for Jehovah or Baal,

so long as they could enjoy their own wealth and privileges. Isaiah describes the princes of his time as "rebellious, and companions of thieves" (Is. i. 23). Jeremiah says of them, in a prophecy uttered in the reign of Josiah, "that they have altogether broken the yoke and burst the bonds" (v. 5); that, "as a cage is full of birds, so are their houses full of deceit; therefore, they are become great, and waxen rich. They are waxed fat, they shine; yea, they overpass the deeds of the wicked; they judge not the cause, the cause of the fatherless, and the right of the needy do they not judge" (Jer. v. 27, 28). Ezekiel bears the same testimony in similar words (Ezek. xxii. 6, 27). From our author we learn that they were opposed to the reformation, and that they were violent and oppressive (Zeph. iii. 3). (9) The "*King's Children*" are further mentioned as objects for the divine vengeance. The fate of Jehoahaz (Shallum), Jehoiakim, and Jedekiah affords the commentary upon this prophecy. They re-established evil customs as soon as their father was dead, and though, in the day of vengeance, they called upon Jehovah, it was too late.

(10) "All such as are clothed in strange apparel" refers to those who put on the sacred robes or vestments used in the worship of the foreign divinities. Cf. Ezek. xiii. 18-21; II. Kings x. 22. Keil considers the expression to refer simply to those who adopted foreign fashions, but the supposition is hardly probable at this period of the people's history. The strong opposition between Jew and Gentile was of later date. The sin which is denounced by Zephaniah in his whole prophecy is apostasy from Jehovah, or hostility towards His worship, and it is for some form of this that we are to look in this passage.

In II. Kings x. 22, referred to above, the word here translated "apparel" is used of the sacred vestments worn by the worshippers of Baal.

(11) The next class denounced is made up of "those who leap upon the threshold, which fill their masters' houses with violence and deceit." This phrase may be rendered "leap above" or "over the threshold," and in this case may refer to the worshippers of the Philistine divinity, Dagon, who, we learn from I. Sam. x. 5, had this peculiar custom. The second clause, "they that fill their masters' houses with violence and deceit," is hard to explain. At first sight it would seem simply to refer to slaves who committed frauds and robberies for their masters' benefit. But the whole connection is with forms of religious error, and the words evidently describe some further characteristics of "those who leap upon the threshold." It may be that the

worshippers of Dagon, or of some other of the heathen divinities, practised these crimes as a religious ceremony, as the Thugs in India used to murder as an offering to their goddess. An allusion to some such practice as this is probably contained in Jer. vii. 8-10, where stealing and murder and adultery are mentioned in connection with the worship of false gods, and excused by the performers upon the ground that "they were delivered" to do these things; *i.e.*, either that these ceremonies formed their ground of hope for deliverance from danger, or that they had been delivered from danger in order that they might show their gratitude by these acts. The verb used, נָצַל cannot be understood as it is frequently by expounders of this passage, *permitted* or *given over to perform* these actions, but means here, as elsewhere, deliverance from danger. Should we translate אַרְנֵיהֶם as a plural of excellence, and understand it as corresponding to Baalim as a title, the sense suggested is still more apparent. That the word, Adon, was used as a divine appellation by heathen as well as Hebrew, is clear from the Phœnician Adonis.

Chapter ii. 4-7 shows us that the Philistines were still a powerful evil in the land. On these grounds it seems best to consider the entire passage as referring to the worshippers of Dagon and the evil customs connected with the *cultus* of that divinity.

In vv. 10, 11, there is probably some special connection between the places mentioned, as singled out for distinction, and idolatrous practices by which they had been defiled, but our information is too scanty to determine what it is. The "Fish Gate," which is mentioned in II. Chron. xxxiii. 14; Neh. iii. 3, xii. 39, was a gate on the southern side of the city near the western wall. From II. Kings xxiii. 8 we learn that it was not unusual for city gates to have "high places" upon them or near them.

The "second" does not mean the second gate, but the second ward or quarter of the city. It is the same word that is used in II. Kings xxii. 14 to describe the dwelling-place of Huldah the prophetess, and is there translated "*college*." The "hills" refer, probably, to the city of David and the Temple hills, so that the three places cited really include nearly the whole city. Maktesh was a valley near the city, so called from its mortar-like shape. Nothing is known of it; its inhabitants, from this passage, seem to have been traders, perhaps sellers of supplies to those sacrificing to the various divinities.

To all these places doom is announced, "crying" and "howling" and "a great crashing"; "the merchant people are cut down, all they that bear silver are cut off."

Thus far the prophet has denounced the active foes of Jehovah, who openly served other gods and opposed the reformation. In v. 12 he comes to the class of the neutral and indifferent,—those whose care was for themselves, and who regretted the stir and turmoil of the new movement, and had no confidence in its success. His language is striking and most forcible: “And it shall come to pass, in that day, that I will search Jerusalem with candles, and punish the men that are settled on their lees, that say in their heart, Jehovah will not do good, neither will he do evil.” The phrase, “settled upon their lees,” means, “have lived a quiet, undisturbed life, of indifference and sloth.” Cf. Jer. xlviii. 11. The figure is taken from wine that has been allowed to stand a long while without disturbance, and which has deposited a good deal of sediment. This needs to be kept quiet and undisturbed, to be clear; if agitated, the sediment rises, and the wine becomes turbid, and its quality is impaired.

From the prophet's words we may gather that the well-to-do class of Jerusalem, who were prosperous and comfortable, and who did not seriously trouble themselves about religion of any kind, resented, or at least opposed a passive resistance to the *new* laws, as they undoubtedly seemed to them, and to the new notions about righteousness and moral qualifications being necessary for worshippers of Jehovah. “Who is Jehovah,” they would enquire, “that he should make such claims upon us, claims that have never been made before? We have lived in this state for centuries, and only began to be troubled when Hezekiah began to stir up dissension and dissatisfaction by removing the high places to which the people were accustomed.” They would argue with a specious force that the worship of Jehovah and the casting out of Baal had not profited the neighboring kingdom, although since the days of Jehu, Jehovah had been the God of Samaria, He had not saved it from the Assyrian. “Why all this commotion and excitement, this overstrained repentance, this impossible covenant, this exaggerated Passover? Jehovah has never done and will never do us any good, nor has he done, nor will he do, any evil. There is no reason for fear, no cause for terror.” These were the Epicureans of the day, who did not believe that the gods trouble themselves about the world. They were the quiet, conservative, moneyed interest, whose motto then as in all ages of the world was, “*Quia non movere.*” And for this they are here denounced by the single-hearted and devoted prophet, as the foes of Jehovah.

From chap. iii. we find that besides these obstacles to reformation, the moral condition of Jerusalem was such that punishment was sure

to come ; and that, as far as morals went, the reformation had been practically fruitless. Here must, of course, be borne in mind that the fact alluded to before, that Zephaniah is not an annalist, but an indignant moralist and preacher of righteousness, rebuking the people for sin, and for rebellion against Jehovah, and that hence it is only to be expected that he will paint the sin of the people in its blackest hue. Much that the simple historian of the period would pass by, appears to the prophet as abomination, sure to bring upon the city the vengeance of Jehovah.

Hence, for a correct appreciation of the period, we need to take a mean between the annalist and the prophet, accepting, however, all the facts stated by the prophet as facts ; for appeals to the conscience that were based upon incorrect facts, and of which the errors could be easily exposed, would have been worse than futile.

His picture of the degraded city doomed to destruction is as follows :
 “Woe to her that is filthy and polluted, the oppressing city ! She obeyed not the voice ; she received not correction ; she trusted not in Jehovah ; she drew not near to her God. Her princes within her are roaring lions ; her judges are ravening wolves, they gnaw not the bones till the morrow ; her prophets are light and treacherous persons ; her priests have polluted the sanctuary, they have done violence to the Law.” In spite of the word of Jehovah in their midst, in spite of the warning given them in the fate of other nations, the people had refused to receive instruction, but “they rose early and corrupted their doings.” On this account punishment must come, and their pride be humbled, and the false confidence which they had in Jehovah as their national God be destroyed.

Neither outwardly nor inwardly had the reformation been a success. It had been violent and sweeping like that of Jehu in Samaria, but like it its work was imperfect. Indeed, it seems to have had even less permanent effect than that of Jehu. Though an outward conformity had been for a time attained, though the temple of Baal had been destroyed, the “high places” removed, and the “groves” cut down, yet the spirit of indifference and the love of the lax morality of heathenism, which had underlain all the forms of unlawful worship, was not removed.

In spite of the burning words of the prophet, in spite of the royal example, in spite of the teachings of the Book of the Law, — so long forgotten, now once again made known to the people, — they preferred their own way, and, as their own wise sage had said, “were filled with the fruit of their own devices” ; and, going on from bad to worse, ripened gradually for destruction.

From our examination of the portions of his prophecy that concern Judah and Jerusalem, we have seen that we have from Zephaniah the following facts, in regard to the condition of religion and morality in the latter part of the reign of Josiah, after the great reformation had begun. Some, though not all, of these facts can be inferred from the language of Jeremiah.

In spite of all that had been done, there were still to be found in the city: (1) a remnant of Baal; (2) Chemarim and (3) rebellious Cohanim; (4) worshippers of the Host of Heaven; (5) secret worshippers of Molech; (6) renegades from Jehovah, (7) and some who had never yielded themselves to His service. These all are to be "cut off" and "destroyed" in the "Day of Jehovah."

Besides these there is a second class, made up of the chief obstacles in the way of reformation, who are to be punished in the day of Jehovah's sacrifice. Their fate, though described in different words, is none the less terrible than that of the former class. These obstacles, in the way of reformation, are: (8) the Princes, the Sarim (שרים); (9) the King's Sons (בני המלך); (10) the wearers of strange (foreign) apparel, *i.e.* sacrificers to foreign divinities; (11) "those who leap upon the threshold" (probably those who have adopted the worship of the Philistine Dagon), "which fill their master's house with violence and deceit" (probably those who rob and steal to fill their Lord's (ארניהם) house with offerings); (12) the merchants and traders as a source of foreign corruption; (13) the indifferent who are "settled upon their lees," and who are incredulous as to the power of Jehovah, "who say Jehovah will not do good, neither will He do evil."

To these elements of religious opposition are to be added the elements of moral degradation among the people. There were two main points in Jehovah's reformation, as in the prophetic teaching upon which it was based: (1) Jehovah, and none else, was to be worshipped, and He, so far as sacrifices were concerned, only in Jerusalem; (2) Jehovah was the God of righteousness and morality. This second point was as strongly insisted upon by the prophets as the first.

Hence we find Zephaniah giving a dreadful description of the moral condition of the people, although from the accounts of the annalists in Kings and Chronicles, we should suppose that the reformation was successful. He tells us (1) of the existence of a generally degraded moral condition among the people (iii. 1); (2) of the rejection of the call to righteousness (iii. 2); (3) of the evil character of the

princes and judges (iii. 3) ; (4) of the instability and treachery of the prophets (iii. 4, *a*, *cf.* Zech. xiii. 2-6) ; (5) of the moral degradation of the priests and the disrepute they brought upon the Law of God (iii. 4, *b*) ; (6) and that, in spite of the corruption, pride was felt in belonging to Jehovah, and a false confidence in the protecting power of the "sanctuary of the holy mountain" (iii. 11).

With these elements of opposition to Jehovah and of moral corruption remaining in the land, it is indeed no wonder that, as soon as Josiah died, a counter revolution should have set in. Yet, strangely enough, the impulse given to the outward worship of Jehovah does not seem lost. In the subsequent reigns, He was worshipped very generally, if not earnestly or intelligently, by the people ; and, as we have seen, Jeremiah was considered a traitor to Him, when he prophesied that His holy city should have the fate of Shiloh. The ritual was kept up, daily ascended the fragrance of the incense and the smoke of the holocausts ; although, in the very chambers of the same Temple, men who worshipped Jehovah at one hour, adored at another "all the idols of the host of Israel." There were a few who remained true to the grand ideal ; noble youths like Daniel and his three comrades in Babylon, princes like Gedaliah, priests like Ezekiel and Jeremiah. These constituted the remnant of Judah, the kernel of life that should spring up into vigorous growth after the captivity, and which should build up a community where the law of the Lord, which men now rejected, should be the one and only rule of life. These were the "servants of Jehovah," the types of the great "Servant of Jehovah," for whom they were preparing the way. Like Him they were "despised and rejected of men, men of sorrows and acquainted with grief," from whom men turned away their faces. And like Him "they bore the griefs and carried the sorrows" of their people. They were "wounded for their transgressions," they were "bruised for their iniquities," bore uncomplainingly the chastisement that should bring peace to their people, and the stripes which should prove their healing. They were the few who "knew Jehovah," and who knew Him to be the Eternal and Righteous God, and their faith and their endurance in the midst of seeming failure won, by God's help, the victory. It is a striking thought that, while the power and might of Josiah, and his forcible methods, were fruitless, the quiet influence of the faithful few preserved, in the long years of exile, the national existence as well as the national religion ; and while powerful Israel never returned, but passed easily from its impure form of worship into the idolatries of the land of captivity, the remnant of Judah, strong in

the faith of the righteous Jehovah, who might be worshipped with sacrifices only in Jerusalem, was strong enough, after seventy years probation, to return and establish once more the theocracy, in which the Law of Jehovah was at once, as the poet sang, "a lantern unto their feet and a light unto their paths." Towards this consummation the prophet Zephaniah performed his allotted part, delivered his message, and has, in his recorded prophecy, left it as a graphic picture of the condition of his country and countrymen.

In his day, even those who worshipped Jehovah had not learned the lesson of righteousness and morality ; and, in spite of their wickedness, yet rejoiced in the pride of the city, and were haughty because of the holy mountain of God. He looked forward, by faith, to the change that would come in time, after God's judgment had been executed upon the guilty land ; when, though the people should be poor and afflicted, and but a remnant of the old glory, they should trust in the name of Jehovah.

The contrast between Zephaniah and the annalists, which is a contrast only, and not a contradiction, is as marked as his exact correspondence and agreement with Jeremiah in almost every point. Any study of the history of the times that will simply follow the annalists and neglect the prophetic testimony, must necessarily be incomplete and convey an incorrect impression of the condition of affairs.