

Professor Georg Sverdrup

Biblical and Church-Historical

Sketches and Addresses

Edited by

Andreas Helland

With an Introduction by Wilhelm Petersen

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Contents

1	First Section	1
1.1	David and Jonathan	1
1.2	The Prophet Samuel	6
1.2.1	Israel in the Time of the Judges	8
1.2.2	Hannah's Song	13
1.2.3	The Judgment upon the House of Eli	17
1.2.4	The Deliverance from the Philistines	22
1.2.5	The Kingdom in Israel	25
1.2.6	Saul and David	27
1.3	The Prophet Jeremiah	32
1.3.1	Israel's People in the Time of Jeremiah	35
1.3.2	The Prophet's Life	38
1.3.3	Jeremiah's Book	46

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The English translations in this volume were generated primarily through artificial intelligence-based language tools operating under detailed scholarly instructions. These translations were subsequently reviewed, evaluated, and corrected through an independent secondary AI process for semantic, theological, and stylistic fidelity to the original Norwegian sources. Editorial responsibility in the present edition is limited to methodological design, critical oversight, and presentation; the original source texts remain authoritative.

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Editorial Sigla.—

Notes marked “—Ed.” originate with Andreas Helland, editor of the 1910 volume.

Notes marked “— Present Ed.” indicate editorial responsibility in the present edition.

Preface

It is now two years since Professor Georg Sverdrup entered into the joy of his Lord. His day of labor in this land extended over a period of thirty-three years. Throughout all this time he worked diligently and untiringly, with mouth and pen, for the quickening and liberation of mankind. During these years he took part in an exceedingly long series of contributions to the various ecclesiastical and churchly questions that stirred men's minds.

The feeling of the heavy loss and the bitter sense of deprivation gradually found expression among many in this wish: If only he had still had time to review and publish, in collected form, a selection of what he had made public in the course of the years, and likewise to revise and publish his theological lectures! — But for this he had no time. He was worn down by labor, felt himself one day more than ordinarily unwell, and the next morning the flag of mourning waved over the school to which, for a generation, he had devoted his best powers.

When the deceased's son, Professor George Sverdrup, Jr., requested me to take steps to collect and, if possible, publish a collection as complete as might be of the departed teacher's writings, I did not think it right to decline, although I already then felt something of the responsibility connected with it and foresaw the difficulties it would entail.

It already presented its difficulties to find the material. A large part of what Professor Sverdrup wrote appeared in the form of treatises and articles in our religious periodicals. But there are very few who have sufficient interest and forethought to preserve such papers from year to year. There are, however, one or two who have kept these old journals, and it is through them that I have succeeded in finding—so far as I am aware—all that has ever been published from Professor Sverdrup's hand. To all those who in this way have rendered this work such valuable service, I herewith express my heartfelt thanks.

The preliminary result of the material thus collected is presented here as the first volume of a work whose final extent has not yet been determined, but which is at any rate intended to comprise at least five volumes.

As regards the publication, it is proper to call attention to the fact that no changes have been made except those of a purely orthographic and linguistic nature. I have believed it right, as far as possible, to make use of the form of language that was common before the very latest radical changes in our spelling, and which the author himself employed in the last years before his death. Thus all plural verb forms have been removed, etc. As concerns citations from the Old Testament, I have followed the translation that has been in use for many years, the so-called "new translation," whereas the author is seen in his citations to

have used what was then the newest translation, namely the so-called “Ryve translation.”

On the other hand, I do not consider it advisable that, in a work such as this, principled changes should be undertaken—something for which, moreover, there has been no ground whatsoever in the present volume. There may arise a question as to whether a treatise should be included or not; but there can be no question of altering a man’s words when one no longer has any opportunity to ascertain how he himself, in such a case, would have altered them.

As to whether the introductory remarks that accompany each section, and the annotations added as notes beneath the text, are of any value, that will be for the kindly reader to judge. My concern has been, if possible, to make everything clear; and I have sought to avoid any danger of misleading. The notes beneath the text that are not marked “—Ed.” (the Editor) are by the author himself.

To the many—both my colleagues at Augsburg Seminary and others—who by counsel and suggestion, and by the interest they have shown in this work, have rendered me valuable help and encouragement, I herewith express my best thanks. In particular, Professor Wilhelm Petersen deserves thanks for the kindness he has shown in attempting an introduction to the work, as well as Professor J. S. Blegen for the many valuable suggestions he has given me again and again.

The portrait of Professor Sverdrup that accompanies this volume is his last, and was taken a few weeks before his death. His signature is a facsimile of his name as written on one of the diplomas he signed the day before his death.

I can only wish that this collection of Professor Georg Sverdrup’s writings may find so kindly a reception that our highly esteemed and deeply missed teacher, and our people’s and our church’s faithful friend, may through it continue to speak to us and to the generation that comes after us.

In a better way we could perhaps scarcely honor the memory of Professor Georg Sverdrup.

Augsburg Seminary, Minneapolis, Minnesota, May 3, 1909.

Andreas Helland.

Introduction

By Wilhelm Petersen.

My first attempt to portray Professor Georg Sverdrup's life¹ was written under the strong influence of the recent loss caused by his sudden death, and without any preparation other than the state of mind into which this naturally placed me, and without any other material to work with than the information I either myself possessed or could easily procure. It was a fluent and imperfect, yet nevertheless sincere and well-intentioned attempt to honor the man whom Augsburg and Kristiania without hesitation place in the foremost rank among the greater spirits and fine, well-formed personalities of the Norwegian Lutheran Church.

A worker of the Church—indeed, a man of the country who is deeply loved—whatever position he may occupy, provided he accomplishes something of real worth, has in his lifetime two difficulties to contend with. The first is that his person, his character, his gifts, his spiritual orientation, and his view of life are, and by the nature of the matter must be, misunderstood and misinterpreted, distorted and unjustly judged by those who happen to be his opponents. Certain traits in an opponent can of course always be acknowledged; but it is almost always the purely formal or phenomenal aspects, that which appears on the surface, such as courage and bravery, aggressiveness and fearlessness in the struggle itself, skill and perseverance in conducting it, strong will and energy, and whatever else belongs to all that which outwardly gives the struggle its purely phenomenal character. To the same category of one-sided and inadequate judgment belongs, naturally, also the overestimation by admirers, supporters, and devotees of the person and his distinctive gifts. There are always fundamental features in a struggle, and it often brings forth certain powerful traits in those who fight. There is always more or less spiritual agitation, which causes the conflict to be viewed from a distance and the judgment to become unjust.

The second difficulty is that what in reality is the significant, the essential, and the characteristic element in a person is concealed or pushed into the background by that which the person in question happens, at the moment, to need most. Professor Sverdrup stood, to a high degree, like many of the Lutheran Church's contending men, under both of these difficulties—despite a sober historical sense and a sound and just judgment of his person built upon it.

The remarkably brief introduction to Professor Sverdrup's Selected Collected Writings is an

¹Professor Georg Sverdrup. A biographical sketch

answer to a request that I write such an introduction, made to me by the publisher of the work, Professor Andreas Høiland, who himself, in his introductory remarks to the individual sections, has touched upon several points that properly belong to a biography, and whose clear and perceptive view of Professor Sverdrup's person and work will, to a considerable degree, help the untrained reader toward a more distant and comprehensive understanding of his life and the work to which he devoted it.

The publication of the work will moreover serve a twofold purpose: first, to refresh the memory of the man to whom the Lutheran Church in America owes so much; and second, to preserve for the congregation, in a more accessible and familiar form, the writings in which he set down the fundamental views upon which his entire ecclesiastical and popular work rested.

For the reasons mentioned in my first biographical attempt, it is still too early to write a biography of Professor Sverdrup that can place his life and his work in their proper historical context and apply the correct historical measure.

The purpose of this brief introduction is therefore only to emphasize what is essential in Professor Sverdrup's work, especially as it emerges over time in his posthumous writings, which in themselves form the most beautiful and enduring memorial of him.

A historical personality may be viewed from different sides. It may be seen in the light of the conditions and surroundings that outwardly condition its appearance in history. Or it may be seen in the light of the aptitude for a particular life calling, recognized through abilities and education. Finally, it may also be seen in the light of the efforts undertaken to attain a certain goal, to solve a particular task.

Taken together, these three elements constitute the complete and full presentation of the personality from a historical point of view, while at the same time casting light upon the complex of spiritual currents and labors upon which the life in question has exerted both transient and lasting influence.

If we then look—if only at the titles—at the written works that are here before us from Professor Sverdrup's hand and mind, we immediately gain the impression that we are standing face to face with a man who occupies himself exclusively with solid questions and tasks, both principled and practical. His spirit pressed downward and inward to that which acts as a driving force in the life of the Church and the congregation; or else to that which, as a historical result, revealed itself to his spiritual clarity of vision as a determining factor in the development of life, and from the recognition of which he never shrank back; or again to that which stood before his spirit as an ideal—radiant and full of promise, yet bearing within it the full content of prudence.

In this way I believe I have indicated what constituted the essential distinguishing mark of his rich intellect. He could never rest in the mere outward fact; rather, from that—which served as the given material for thought—he sought to return to the very essence, to the principle. And in this tireless search to find not only the true interconnection of things, but also their logical development from a principle firmly grounded in life, his entire scholarly orientation was revealed—one that was in all essential respects dialectical, that is, the method of Socrates as presented in Plato’s writings. How he admired the sharp, incisive, ironic quality of Socratic thinking—the truth-content recognized by its own keen observation, built upon an uncompromising and prejudice-free gaze!

Richly endowed by nature and developed through the study of Greek philosophy—which he had assimilated in an entirely original way—he was thereby fitted, as few are, to untie historical knots and to cast light upon historical life, which his spirit sympathetically lived through and absorbed in the fullest measure. Thus his presentation gained life and color, in that he himself lived along with everything he depicted. It would be difficult to find a more intimate balance between subjective and objective understanding and presentation.

But although he was scientific in his pursuit of truth, and although he possessed a rare power of exposition, he was nevertheless far too much of a fighting nature to settle into a purely formal recognition of truth or into a barren, dogmatic comprehension of results already attained. He did not merely work with the truth; the truth worked within him. And thus, in accordance with his entire temperament, he ranged beyond forms and formulas until he stood freely above the whole spiritual battlefield, where, like a field commander, he brought his heaviest artillery forward at the point where he saw the position most urgently required it. People easily misunderstand such a man. And if he is placed within what are commonly called “small” circumstances—where one must struggle against ingrained prejudices, where people’s narrower influences and self-interests render both friends and enemies, both supporters and opponents, cowardly, malicious, and wavering—then a rare strength of character is demanded, an almost unceasing vigilance, in order not to turn aside from the path once perceived as the one true way. Professor Sverdrup suffered under the difficulty of such a position to the same degree as many others who are endowed by nature with rare gifts and are called by God to wage the struggle of personality for truth and justice against complacency and class hatred, against indifference and self-interest.

And should one seek a clear, unmistakable testimony to the intensity with which he perceived this position of struggle, and at the same time to the clarity and sharpness of thought with which he was able to present his view, one could scarcely find anything better than the following brief piece, discovered among his papers and which was either a draft for a speech

or an outline for a longer article. Any commentary is entirely superfluous. It is, however, fairly likely that he wrote this at a relatively young age. Both style and handwriting bear witness to that.

All hands on deck; draw the sword from the scabbard; let the cannon flash in the sun; strike upon the souls, that the sound of arms may be heard far across the land. The time is come; the air is heavy with thunder; let the thunder roll in the cloud and the lightnings strike with flash upon flash in the murk of night. The powers of the world are stirred; let the powers of heaven be stirred within us. God's Church is in peril; let men girded with weapons guard her. Against the Lie we use sharp swords; against the Lie we bear shining helmets; against the Lie we take up bright shields. But the Lie is not outside God's Church, but within her walls. Therefore awake, thou Christian Church, wherever thou art found; therefore awake, thou watchman of Zion, and sound the trumpet, that it may give a clear sound.

The Lie is this, that Christ is dead; for behold, He lives. The Lie is this, that Christianity is pure doctrine and the understanding of intellects and the clarity of thought; for behold, it is the life of love and the foolishness of love. The Lie is this, that the Church is an institution to rule over men; for behold, it is the home of freedom and the fellowship of the freed. The Lie is this, that the Church must employ the world's falsehood and deceit in order to be cunning as the serpent; for behold, she is the holy witness of truth and simplicity. The Lie is this, that the world is the Church's most dangerous enemy; for behold, it is the object of God's love. The Lie is this, that the Church is pure; for behold, she is full of rottenness and stench. The Lie is this, that Christianity is the world's hatred; for behold, it is the world's love. The Lie is this, that the Church must fear the world; for behold, the world is overcome. The Lie is this, that the Church must go outward to find her life; for behold, her enemy is in her midst. Let us find him where his work is among us; let us know him for what he is. Let us meet him as Christ once did: I am He whom ye seek.

"The truth in love" was perhaps as much as anything an expression of the whole direction of Professor Sverdrup's spirit.²

²In this introduction, the editor's narrative voice has been rendered in contemporary English for clarity,

For such a man there was scarcely room in Norway in the seventies. But with the elasticity of spirit that was his own, he soon made himself at home with the thought of working among his people outside Norway. It is not the intention here to portray the profoundly world-embracing character of Sverdrup's understanding of Christianity and church work in contrast to that which prevailed in Norway at the time. He himself has portrayed this in masterly fashion in *Memories from Norway*, a work that must always form the point of departure for a fuller historical account of the reasons that brought Oftedal and Sverdrup to America. The justification of this understanding, and the correctness of these reasons, are testified to clearly enough by the subsequent ecclesiastical development in Norway.

All that remains is, in brief outline, to characterize the position into which Professor Sverdrup necessarily came when he thus tore himself away from the mother soil and "chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God" than to hold a comfortable position in a state church in which, according to his ecclesiastical convictions, he could not feel at home.

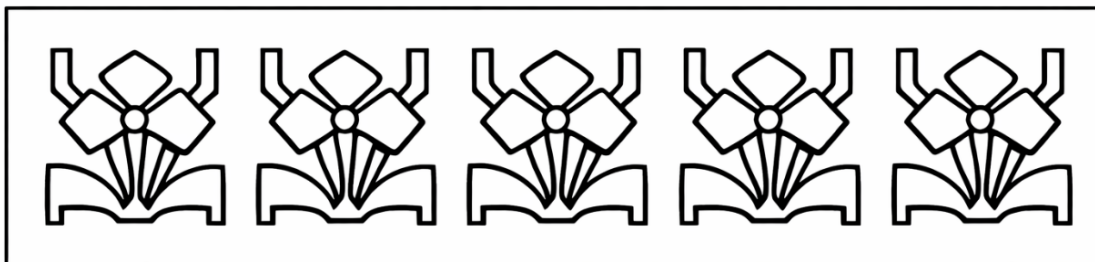
This position was essentially the same for the two men whose names in Norwegian-American church history are so closely bound together that it is possible to separate them only in a purely formal sense. Confronted with the emerging church life in the new land, these two men stood searching for a way to move beyond the old-fashioned, purely institutional conceptions. And both of them, with the burning zeal and driving force of youth, threw themselves into the work of building—indeed, we may just as well say founding—the Church upon the congregation.

This word, which together with freedom and spirit has been so terribly abused, casts light upon all the work that constitutes the key to understanding all the views that bear the name Augsburg Seminary. It was a struggle on all sides that these two men undertook and carried on. That they should be regarded as disturbers of the peace, as dangerous men, was something anyone familiar with similar historical phenomena must have expected. Nor did they in any way attempt to seek shelter from the attacks that were directed against them from so many and varied quarters. That, moreover, only served to focus attention upon them all the more sharply. But it is neither too early nor too hasty—nor yet too late—to say here that these two men, whatever else may be said of them, represented an ecclesiastical vision and an ecclesiastical work that history has sanctioned.

Here it suffices to point to the writings of Professor Sverdrup that lie before us, which as clearly as any human presentation can express it contain two things: dissatisfaction with, and

while quoted material originating with Professor Sverdrup has been translated in a more elevated register. This reflects the contrast of tone present in the Norwegian original between historical exposition and exhortative prose.

the inadequacy of, the old modes of thought and inherited forms; and the advocacy of a free and living congregation as the only foundation—both biblically and historically sound—for the building of a true kingdom of God on earth. For this Professor Sverdrup labored and fought; for this he suffered and died; and no one shall deprive him of the honor of having kindled a light in the Church upon which, even to this very day, many still look with joy and gratitude.



1 First Section

The three following biblical sketches will give, though doubtless only a faint impression, of why Professor Gederdrup's lectures on the Old Testament so powerfully captivated his hearers. The noble, poetic language, the thoroughly biblical tone, the holy reverence for the Lord's testimony as it came to His people through His preacher, were such prominent characteristics of this branch of his teaching that it seized the listeners in a peculiar manner and held them fast. When, with his clear gaze sharpened by the Spirit of God, he opened the Scriptures for his students and looked into the hidden depths of God's counsel, many a heart was made to burn. — Ed.

1.1 David and Jonathan

[Source: Svartal-Skrift for the Norwegian Lutheran Church in America. Edited by Prof. Gederdrup and Oftedal. Third Year. 1877. Pages 44–48. — Ed.]

This section appears on pages 1–5 of the original volume. — Present Ed.

And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.

The time seems to have come in which this word is being fulfilled. At a deep and fundamental level there stirs the unrighteousness of self-love, and it appears as though petty vanity and rending envy have become dominant, not only in the politics of this world, but also among those who call themselves by His name, who went into death for His friends.³ Even in the Church of God it seems that the gentle south wind does not blow, that wind which causes the flowers to give forth their fragrance in God's garden, but rather a cold, cutting winter snow, which causes the fairest plants to wither and the noblest shoots to die.

³Sverdrup's prose is woven like fabric held under tension and is best understood when read aloud. — Present Ed.

Therefore we will bring forth the loveliest image of the love of friends that we can find, and by it we will warm our own hearts. For though thou shouldest take the coldest thing thou knowest—though thou shouldest take death’s cold mist⁴, wherein human hearts grow stiff and the blood congeals—yet love is strong as death. And where the fire of love burns, there it is of no avail that the wind blows and the waters stream over it; for every cold gust shall only cause the flame to blaze the more freshly upon the hearth, and the many waters cannot quench love. In tribulation it grows, in darkness it shines, in cold it is the warmer; the greater the conflict, the greater the courage; the more hindrances, the more glorious the outcome.

A young man, ruddy of countenance, comely of form and fair to behold, was David, the son of Jesse, from Bethlehem. Scarcely more than a youth among bleating sheep upon the pastures of Judah; over its hills and through its valleys he led his flock; his playing and his song sounded over the green meadows and by the murmuring brooks. His harp he had learned to tune by the rushing of the rivers and in the stillness of the forests, and the praise of the Lord he had learned to sing while he walked alone upon the field where Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had pitched their tents with their flocks, in faith and expectation of the Lord’s promise, that the land should be given unto them and to their children for ever.

The glorious inheritance of promise which had been given to the tribe of Judah had become the shepherd boy’s inheritance, and by it he had been assured that Goliath of the Philistines was not to be feared by the people of God, but that the Lord would give His people victory over all their enemies, if they boldly trusted in Him.

Then came a day when the prophet Samuel went down, by the command of the Lord, to anoint one of the sons of Jesse to be king over His people; for Saul was rejected from before the face of the Lord. And Jesse brought forth his sons, one by one, before the prophet of the Lord. And the prophet said, when he saw Eliab: “Surely the Lord’s anointed is before Him.” But the Lord said: “Look not on his countenance, nor on the height of his stature; for I have rejected him: for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.”

And Jesse brought forth his seven sons, but none of them was chosen of God. Then David was lacking; he who kept the little flock had yet to come. And the Lord said unto Samuel: “Arise, anoint him; for this is he.” And Samuel anointed him, and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day.

⁴The original text uses “Dødens kolde Taarning” While Taarning resembles the word for “tower” in this 19th-century context it functions as an archaic variant of taage/taaning (mist/fog). “Mist” better captures the intended metaphor of a chilling, numbing atmosphere that stiffens the heart. — Present Ed

But over Saul there was an evil spirit; and David was brought to Saul, and his pleasant playing was a refreshment and a restoring of life for the sick and torn heart of the man, and the evil spirit departed from him at David's playing. But Saul was rejected of the Lord, and David was chosen in his stead.

At this time the Philistines went up against Israel, and Saul summoned the host against them. And Saul had a son whose name was Jonathan, and he was a hero in war, and victory followed him against the Philistines, for he also had set his heart upon the LORD, and in the name of Israel's God he smote the enemies of Israel. Among Israel's heroes Jonathan was the flower, an ornament unto Israel, a joy and delight to the people of God. He was the king's son, and the people rejoiced in hope of the day when he should sit upon his father's throne.

Then came the great champion of the Philistines, the mighty Goliath, and set himself forth to single combat. And he reviled the armies of Israel, and he mocked their God, and there was none who dared to meet him. Fear and dread lay upon the whole host of Israel; but David was not among them, for he went about upon the fields of Bethlehem and kept his father's flock. Yet he also would behold the Philistine champion, and he went to the camp; and the Spirit of the LORD came upon him. With a sling in his hand and smooth stones from the brook in his shepherd's pouch, he went against the champion in the name of God. And against the champion with sword and spear he set the LORD as his shield and defender, and the Philistine fell before the despised shepherd-boy of Israel.

Then there was jubilation in Israel, then the daughters of the people sang with gladness the praise of David. But a dark and hellish thought crept into the heart of Saul; envy seized him, and bitter hatred toward David, because the LORD had chosen him and given him the strength of faith, which was the true kingly adornment among the people of the LORD. But the heart of Jonathan opened itself toward the unknown shepherd-boy; his heroic spirit rejoiced in the heroic deed, his faith was strengthened by David's boldness of faith; he recognized the LORD's Chosen and loved him. And as brooks that meet in the valley, gently and silently glide together and cast themselves into one another's embrace, unable to do otherwise, so heart was bound to heart and soul to soul, when Jonathan and David found one another on the day of victory.

Saul's hatred and persecution brought, from that day onward, tribulation and distress upon David. It was the Lord's school of love, wherein the chosen king was to be prepared to become a true ruler of people and land. Thus, driven from the king's court, threatened with death, hunted from place to place like a wild beast, he no longer had any home, any resting place, save in the Lord's faithfulness and in Jonathan's friendship.

Jonathan sheltered him from danger; Jonathan warned him against his father's cruelty; Jonathan went to him in the forest and strengthened his hand in God. Jonathan defended him before his father, so that Saul, even in his fury, hurled his spear at his own son.

Was there anything for Jonathan to gain by such faithfulness to his persecuted friend? On the contrary, it seemed as though there was everything to lose. There were many bonds that surged against this love and would have quenched it, yes, even turned it into bondage to Saul. Temptation lay on every side for Jonathan to give way; yet in all things he was found faithful.

Saul, his father, was rejected by the Lord, and David was chosen in his stead. David was to receive Jonathan's inheritance; the son was to lose all because of the father's sin. Envy and wounded vanity might well have gathered bitterness in Jonathan's heart; yet his friendly mind remained at peace with this thought: David shall be the first in the kingdom, and I shall stand at his side.

Jonathan was the pride of Israel; now a shepherd boy was to go before him. He who had gone foremost in Israel's wars was to give way to one who had gone behind the bleating sheep. It seemed a bitter thought, but Jonathan found rest in the confidence that the Lord chooses whom He will to prepare His people.

Daily Saul's kingdom declined; daily Jonathan had to see faithfulness to Saul give way to the growing sympathy for David. David's nobility cast a heavy shadow over Saul's faithless course. Jonathan felt how it cut through the heart to see his father overwhelmed with shame; yet in all this he prevailed.

And David, who was hunted and persecuted, who was not deemed worthy to have even a cave in the land where Saul had his throne—his soul too was surely tempted to hate both father and son. He must have feared what Jonathan would do when Saul was dead. He might well have thought it better that the whole house of Saul were destroyed, if he were to have peace upon Israel's throne. There was temptation when he saw Jonathan alone and himself despised; there was temptation when he met him alone in the field, alone in the forest. Might he not think: "This is the heir; if he is gone, then the struggle is ended at Saul's death"? Yet in all this David prevailed.

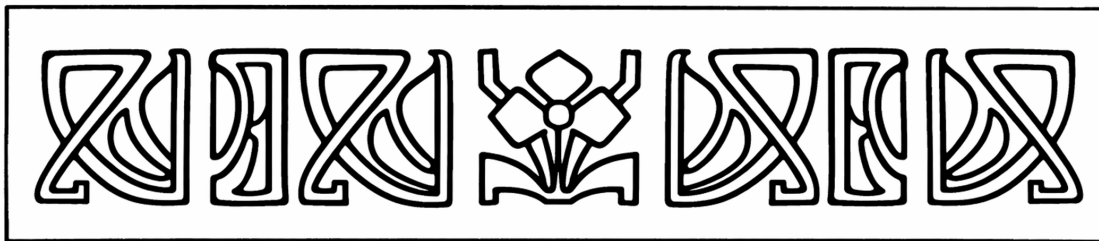
Then came the final battle. The Philistines attacked Israel; Saul and Jonathan went out against them. Alone the friend went with his blinded father. He fought for the rejected one; he himself had nothing to gain thereby. For David's land fought Saul's son; for Saul's victory fought David's friend. But David was not at his side. The tumult of slaughter increased, and the struggle grew fierce; Jonathan fell in the unequal fight. But David's lament has borne Jonathan's name unto this day:

I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me; thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.

Why did Jonathan fight, why did David suffer?

For Israel's hope, which was greater to them than their own honor.

Thus the Lord bound hearts together in unbreakable friendship and rock-fast faith for His people and its hope.



1.2 The Prophet Samuel

Source: Quarterly Journal. 7th Year. 1881. Pages 142–174. Separate offprint. “Vinggaardsmanden” Publishing House. 1903. — Ed.

This section appears on pages 6–35 of the original volume. — Present Ed.

God’s people are, in one respect, distinguished above all other peoples upon the earth. They are an elect people, a people for God’s own possession. In other respects there is no difference between Israel and the other nations. There is the same human nature, the same lust toward sin, the same needs, the same struggle for existence and for life among all peoples, Israel not excepted. “The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people” (Deut. 7:7), says Moses, through whom the LORD had also said: “Understand therefore, that the LORD thy God giveth thee not this good land to possess it for thy righteousness; for thou art a stiffnecked people” (Deut. 9:6).

By nature Israel is like the heathen; but by election it is lifted up out of the multitude of the nations, and it became true what Balaam said when he saw the camp of Israel spread out before him: “Lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations” (Num. 23:9).

Election made Israel unique among the peoples, and its life and history are unique in the history of the world. For election gave Israel a particular calling in the world and a particular trust from God. Israel alone received the special calling to become a blessing to all nations, and Israel alone received the special calling that the Word of God should be entrusted to it.

While all the other peoples desired the world and its goods, and sought to tear them to themselves and to rob one another, Israel, by the election, was called to love the world; and so far from robbing anything from the world or snatching anything from the poor race of mankind, the people of Israel were rather, in love and compassion and sorrow, to bear within themselves a promised treasure, which they should always be willing to share with all: the

Word of God. With a rich gift for the world Israel went its heavy way and suffered for the peoples, while the peoples tumbled themselves in the lust of the world and reaped perdition from their sin.

But in the light of the Word of God Israel was, under its heavy pilgrimage, to see the goal clearly and shining before it; and while the heathen groped in the darkness, ever fearing the uncertain future, while they sought soothsayers and diviners and casters of lots and interpreters of dreams and oracles, in order to gain some clarity concerning the things to come, Israel was to have the light of prophecy burning and shining in a dark place. As Balaam had said: “— in thy time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, what God doeth.” (Num. 23:23).

It is the glory of the election that Israel may walk in the light of the Word. And herein the history of Israel, and of all God’s people, becomes different from all other history: that it not only has its goal—for all history has that—but that the goal is clearly and distinctly set before the people, so that the ancient people may lift up its gaze with certainty and courage toward the eternal kingdom which the Lord will prepare, and that by the light of prophecy the way to the goal is clearly marked out, so that it need not go astray.

But against the light of the Word rises the doubt and cleverness of the understanding, and against the heavy duty of the calling rises the lust of the flesh. And the whole history of Israel becomes filled with an unceasing struggle between flesh and Spirit, between prescription and faith, so that scarcely is there given on earth a more torn and storm-filled history than that of God’s people. God has set the calling and the destiny, and he continually raises up men and women in Israel who lift its glory and its responsibility high before a corrupt and perverse people; and again and again the great multitude in Israel spares itself and says: We will not walk in the way of the Lord! And thus there arise violent upheavals and heart-rending struggles between God’s glorious calling and the fleshly nature of the people.

There are great men in Israel, as in every other people; there are chieftains and standard-bearers; there are leaders of the people and speakers for the people. But in truth great in God’s people is only the man or the woman who follows the Spirit’s calling and gives himself wholly over to the goal which God has appointed for His people. “A man in whom is the Spirit” (Num. 27:18) is the only one who is fitted to be leader and shepherd in Israel; he alone is the man “who may go out before their face and go in before their face, and who may lead them out and bring them in” (Num. 27:17). It is the Lord’s man whose calling it is to behold the Lord’s goal and follow its summons; and only he who himself has walked in the way of the Spirit can go before the people on their way toward the goal set by God.

Great abilities and glorious gifts do indeed make a man eminent in Israel, as among all peoples, even when the gifts are taken into the service of the flesh and of the world; but great in truth is only he who laid the great and glorious gifts down before the Lord and said, “Here am I; send me,” and who thereafter went forth in the Spirit’s power and the Spirit’s light before God’s people, and showed them where the Lord’s way was.

Such a Spirit-borne leader in God’s people is Samuel. He is one of the few men in history who have been an instrument for the renewal of an entire people, and who, without bloodshed and deeds of violence, were able to gather what was scattered and unite what was divided. At his death Israel stood moved and established; for his own time he saw the people united and strong as never since the death of Joshua. Yea, though such great things had been accomplished and so much had been changed, Samuel could nonetheless step forward and receive from his people a full and complete testimony to righteousness and innocence in his entire public course.

It would be more than worthwhile to follow the struggle and labor of his life for his precious people. The Spirit of God has preserved the chief features of the great man’s life as a testimony for the latest generations.

1.2.1 Israel in the Time of the Judges

In a people that grows in a sound and vigorous manner, there are two powers which often seem to draw each its own way, yet which only when they are united become a true blessing for the people; these are freedom and unity. Israel had been driven together in need and oppression under the Egyptians’ harsh bondage. Moses had led the wretched people out into freedom, and his strong hand and superior might had preserved the people, corrupted by slavery and oppression, from again being split and scattered and thus perishing. Joshua had taken the governance over Israel with dauntless courage and had led it through struggle and distress, through victory and triumph, into the promised land.

But the two mighty leaders whom God had raised up for Israel were gone. There was none to take their place. Israel had to try to walk without the guidance which in its childhood had been so sorely needed, and which the Lord had given it in such abundant measure. Israel, which had been held together by the superior spirit of strong rulers and by the distress and peril amid which it was born, now entered a season of freedom and cohesion. It had been as a child under its mighty leaders, freely protected, yet in many ways still immature. After the death of the great men, Israel was to try to stand upon its own feet; and with the Law and the worship of God as constraining bonds, the people were to preserve in freedom what they

had received as an unmerited gift.

Israel had strength enough to preserve its independence, if only it had faith enough. Israel's strength lay in its election, and that election could become a living power only through faith. If faith failed, then election became merely a threatening responsibility instead of a saving force.

But Israel did not preserve faith; when distress was gone, when the pressure was over, when good days followed upon the heavy times of struggle, then Israel laid itself to rest; it grew fat and wanton, and in its soul, out of its freedom and advantage, it turned away from the Lord who had saved it, and from the God who had borne it upon eagles' wings.

Israel sought freedom, not in God, but in the world. Toward the more vile gods of the Canaanites, and toward their immoral and cruel idolatry, they were drawn with irresistible desire. And as Israel sank down into the vices and idolatry of the Canaanites, it lost the power by which it had been upheld and knit together. The result was bondage and dissolution. The strong, youthfully vigorous people who under Joshua had marched into Canaan were captured and ensnared by the Canaanites' licentiousness and worldliness. It renounced its election; it let its high goal slip out of sight; and thus it lost both its freedom and its unity. The foreign peoples found easy prey, and the individual tribes were severed from one another. The bonds of brotherhood, which were the one spirit, were gone, because the manifoldness of the world scattered the minds which could be united only in God.

But the Lord had not forsaken His people. Though it plunged itself like a prodigal son into the pleasures of the world, the Lord yet also let it taste the bitterness of the world's bondage; and in need and misery Israel was brought unto the Lord and gained new experience of His faithfulness and grace, when the Lord raised up deliverers for His people who, in the power of the Spirit, led the people to victory and freedom. The judges and their work bear witness that the Lord remained faithful where Israel was unfaithful. The election and the covenant with the fathers stood firm where Israel failed.

But despite the work of the judges and the working of the Spirit of the Lord, Israel declined ever further. And the last judge, Samson, stood entirely alone against the enemies of God's people. Yes, not only that. Seduced and swept away by Philistine heathendom, inflamed by Samson's own intemperance, the men of Judah would even bind their champion themselves and deliver him into the power of the enemies. So low had the people sunk through the lust of the world and its bondage. And Samson himself, so great and richly gifted, fell so deeply that sorrow and shame cleave to his name and to his history forever. Samson, ensnared, sleeping with his head in Delilah's lap while the hair of his head—the sign of his election—was shorn

away, so that powerless and helpless he was given into the hands of the Philistines—this is an image of the people of Israel in that time. As Samson renounced his election for the lust of the world and sank strengthless into the hand of his enemies.

But Samson had strength to die for his people; alone, cast off and despised, trampled underfoot and abused, he had not forgotten his people; in the hour of his death his thought and his soul were with the precious, chosen Israel. But there is hope for that people whose sons go into death for it. Thus Israel still had a future before it. Yet it could not attain it except by the hand of the Lord; therefore the Lord sent them the voice of awakening through the mouth of Samuel.

The life of the people in the time of the Judges was in many respects wild and crude. Clearly and solemnly had the Lord admonished His people through the mouth of Moses and of Joshua, that they should not bind themselves to the Canaanite nations. Scarcely is there any people in the world who hastened more swiftly toward destruction through the corruption of morals than precisely the Canaanite peoples. Sodom and Gomorrah fell as the first terrifying example of the Lord's judgment upon moral corruption and unnatural lust. Yet the punitive judgment did not put an end to the corruption of morals. The cruel and cunning Canaanites united the lust of the world with the wisdom of the world, and their cities, which distinguished themselves by wealth and prosperity, became also the homes of vice and excess, unto which ungodliness ascended unto heaven crying for vengeance. The divine mercy was therefore compelled to cry words of warning to young Israel, which entered into so corrupt a land, where even the temples of the idols had become dwellings of indecency.

But the solemn admonitions did not bear the desired fruit. It was not long before we find the sins of Sodom within the cities of Israel. The Israelite and the Canaanite youth took pleasure in one another's company. Although there had stood a separation between the older generations of the two peoples, keeping them apart from one another, this separation no longer had the same meaning or the same effect upon the rising generation. The young men of Israel took Canaanite wives, and Israel's daughters were given in marriage to the Canaanites. The wild, luxuriant life of the world seemed intent on swallowing all and everything.

Yet God had preserved His own. Though the corruption was great and widespread, the spark of faith was not extinguished, nor was the voice of testimony silenced, and the God-fearing life of Israel had not wholly ceased. There were still not only great and chosen instruments of the Lord, but also here and there small and inconspicuous souls who faithfully preserved Israel's faith and lived by the blessed hope of the promises. There was Naomi, whose faith even drew the heathen woman into God's people and the truth of His promises. Ruth left

Moab, her land and her people, her kindred and her gods; and there was also a man such as Elkanah and his household, who observed the Lord's commandments and ordinances and year by year went up to the sanctuary to appear before God at Shiloh, where the Tabernacle had stood since the days of Joshua.

Elkanah had two wives; and this unhappy violation of God's order, which was and is so common among the peoples of the East, brought also in Elkanah's house the usual restless consequences. Quarreling and bitterness, sorrow and tears have followed polygamy everywhere, and do so unto this very day. Women often have hard conditions and a burdensome life even among us, who boast that we have lifted them up out of subjection and bondage. When once the voice of the oppressed and tormented shall be heard in righteousness and truth, it will be made manifest that many a sorrowful and broken woman has borne more heart, even among us, than many have been able to imagine. Yet both the one and the other woman suffers among us wherever polygamy rules, and this becomes common and daily. Hannah, the mother of Samuel, was also made to prove this in full measure. She had no children, while the other wife rejoiced in sons and daughters.

Hannah's lot was heavy and painful; yet the Lord had made it thus for Hannah, because He would reveal His glory and highly exalt the humbled and bitterly afflicted woman. "The barren woman shall dwell in the house as a joyful mother of children" (Psalm 113:9). And there was to be more blessing in the one son who was given her in her sorrow and prayers than in many sons and daughters over whom there had been jubilation and delight. The heart learns first in distress and sorrow the great mystery of yielding itself wholly to God; and only that life which has been consecrated through sorrow is able to become a full fountain of joy both for itself and for the people of God.

Hannah had learned to find consolation in sorrow and help in distress. To God she went with her affliction, and before Him she poured out her heart in His sanctuary. Israel's high priest, Eli, was witness to her prayer in that hour of endurance. He was a respectable and agreeable man. Calm and without clamor was the stamp of his inner life. Appointed from childhood to be the Lord's high priest and the spiritual leader of God's people, he had doubtless also from childhood been accustomed to the Word of God and the temple of God. It was to Eli so familiar, so everyday, so commonplace. It seemed to follow of itself that he should be God-fearing, at least outwardly. And though he could not entirely avoid many serious thoughts and moving moments, yet earnestness and the struggle of life seemed not to have laid hold of his whole soul.

Thus it goes with many who have become priests and servants of God from outward con-

siderations: for the sake of the family, for the sake of honor and reputation, or even for the sake of livelihood. Their hearts do indeed feel a seriousness and gravity; yet it often passes away with a sigh and a small prick of conscience, and of any share in full surrender to God in repentance and faith there is often nothing at all. Such priests indeed know the Word of God, but not the Spirit of God; and the inward spiritual movements and the struggle, the death of the soul and the fear of sin, the joy of the Spirit and the gladness of the life of God are things unknown to them. They account it enthusiasm or madness, or at least a peculiarity.

So it went also with Eli. He saw Hanna sunk down in prayer; her bitter affliction pressed her low, and her pain was too great for her to find words for it. But Eli did not understand what was stirring within this neglected heart, and his blunted spiritual sense did not so much as divine the mystery of distress and prayer. Therefore it seemed to him incomprehensible what it was that truly moved the woman, whose bitterly sorrowing and sorely oppressed mind was mirrored in her countenance, and whose lips moved according to the inner longings of her heart, without any audible word passing over them. Eli supposed her to be drunken, much as those who were witnesses of the outpouring of the Spirit upon the Apostles supposed that they were “full of new wine.” It is that spiritual sluggishness, that heartless indifference to the need or the joy of others, that materialistic incapacity to comprehend the nature of the Spirit, which here makes itself known. Eli’s official piety was unacquainted with such soul-rending workings of the Spirit as those Hanna experienced in her soul.

But Hanna had prayed as one who struggles for life, and she had vowed to the Lord the son for whom she had pleaded. There was full earnestness in her soul; and when she prayed for a son, it was not with the selfish desire to have him for herself, but with the true love’s willingness to offer him up to God and to His people. She had won peace in the struggle; she had conquered herself and the turmoil of her agitated mind; she had pressed through to the heart of the Lord and found mercy, and she was able calmly to answer Eli’s harsh and almost mocking words.

She told Eli what had been hidden from him. It was not wine or strong drink that made her so strange and incomprehensible to men; but anguish of heart and soul, which had opened her whole being before God, had made her manner a mystery to men. She had prayed, not as one who prays in order to display an ability before God, but as one who cries out of the depths unto the Lord.

It struck Eli in an instant. For the old man knew well that such was the prayer which breaks through all hindrances and presses its way up to the living God, Israel’s mighty Father. Thus had Jacob wrestled in the night by the Jabbok. Thus had Moses striven upon the mountain

for the faithless people and for those chosen from among them. Eli understood that he stood face to face with one of the Lord's elect, and his words were heart-comforting for Hannah: "Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him" (1 Sam. 1:17).

Comforted and relieved, Hannah went to her home. The encounter with the Lord in the sanctuary had given her new courage to take hold of life's daily round of quiet struggles and the toil, burden, and weariness of household labor. In the great conflict and the bitter sorrow, her heart had been strengthened for the lesser sorrows and cares through which she yet must pass.

The Lord fulfilled Hannah's prayer. She received a son and called his name Samuel; it means, "Heard of God"; for, said she, of the Lord have I asked him.

This time the son's name is full truth. By prayer he was given; and in prayer the strength of his life was to abide. This is the secret of the life of God's people, that God hears prayers. It is the expression of God's fatherly heart toward His children. And it is faith's proper victory over all unbelief and materialism, that it prays to the living, personal God and is heard. Around this stood the great conflict in the days of Samuel, as it repeats itself also now, after three thousand years have passed away.

God's living personality and the conquering power of faith lie most simply and most clearly expressed in the word: God hears prayers. And around this all in Samuel's life was to turn—to bear witness for Israel to the living, almighty God, the merciful and gracious Father, whom Israel was in danger of exchanging for dead idols, and to that distinctive power of faith which was to be Israel's mark and the world-overcoming strength.

Samuel, therefore, is the name that designates the champion of God over against the seductive powers of idolatry and materialism. Samuel is the name that designates the giant of faith over against the coldness of unbelief and the darkness of superstition.

1.2.2 Hannah's Song

Samuel was to be consecrated unto the Lord, a Nazirite from the cradle unto the grave. Such was the meaning of the Nazirite calling: that, in a living image, they bore witness before Israel to its vocation and its standing. As Israel was the Lord's covenant possession, so were the Nazirites to be a testimony thereof before the people. — Samuel was also to abide in the Lord's sanctuary all the days of his life. Hannah was not to keep him at home; with the Lord was his home to be. He belonged to that God who had heard his mother's prayer. In the sanctuary he was to grow up, that his soul, from childhood onward, might live with God,

and that he might thus be strengthened and prepared for his work in Israel.

Hannah therefore kept him with her until he was weaned. Yet the vow unto God lay upon her and had to be fulfilled. Many a time must her eye have rested, with tear-mingled joy, upon the boy upon her lap, whom she was to give back unto the Lord. And many thoughts must have flowed through the soul of that godly woman as she looked with longing toward better times for God's people, and pondered whether the Lord would suffer the little one to grow up into a chosen instrument for the working of His Spirit in the nation. Her thoughts doubtless turned back to Sarah, the barren woman who became the mother of Israel; to Rebekah, who had cried unto the Lord as she herself had done, and had become the mother of Jacob. And within Hannah there arose a hope which the Spirit of the Lord fashioned into glad assurance in her heart, that her son would become a means in the Lord's hand to usher a new age upon God's people. That which was scattered was to be gathered, that which was disturbed was to be made firm, and the Lord's anointed was to grant the people the peace and freedom for which they sighed.

Thus time passed on, and the mother's heart was enlarged more and more by the thought that the sacrifice she was to bring would be richly repaid through the great work which the Lord would appoint her son to accomplish for His people. The mother who has first learned to behold the people's distress and the Lord's consecrated love, she offers with joy her dearest child, if his life and labor, far from home, might bear blessed fruit for the whole people. True, the hut would seem empty when little Samuel no longer leapt smiling about within it; yet the mother thought of how, through her pain, a light might be kindled whose blessed radiance could fall into so many hearts and dwellings in Israel. And thus she remained faithful to her God and to the vow she had made.

The day came when Samuel must go with her to Shiloh. The light and strength of the land followed Hannah, and she went with joy along that road which she had so often before imagined as painful and heavy. To Shiloh, to the sanctuary, to Eli went the little company; and the least in that company was to become the greatest in the people of God. With deep and inward emotion Hannah stepped forward before Eli, and now Eli learned what Hannah had prayed and vowed on the day when she had spoken so bitterly and poured out her soul before the Lord. There stood Samuel, granted by the Lord; now he was to be presented back to Him.

But Hannah prayed again—not a prayer of pain as on that former day of sorrow, but a prayer of praise and joy, such as only one woman after her has sung. A song of praise the Spirit of the Lord laid upon Hannah's lips, which was to resound again with unspeakable joy from the

mouth of the mother of Jesus:

Glad is my heart in the Lord; Exalted is my horn in the Lord; My mouth is opened wide against mine enemies, For I rejoice in thy salvation.

There is none holy as the Lord, For there is none beside thee; Neither is there any rock like our God.

Speak no more exceeding proud words; Let not insolence come out of your mouth; For the Lord is a God of knowledge, And by him actions are weighed.

The bows of the mighty are broken, And they that stumbled are girded with strength.

They that were full have hired themselves out for bread, And they that were hungry hunger no more; Yea, the barren hath borne seven, And she that had many children languisheth.

The Lord killeth, and maketh alive; He bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up.

The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich; He bringeth low, and lifteth up also.

He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, He lifteth up the needy from the dunghill, To set them among princes, And to make them inherit the throne of glory. For the pillars of the earth are the LORD's, And He hath set the world upon them.

The steps of His faithful ones He preserveth, But the wicked shall be silent in darkness; For not by might shall a man prevail.

The LORD—His adversaries shall be broken to pieces; Over them shall He thunder in heaven. The LORD shall judge the ends of the earth; He shall give strength unto His king, And exalt the horn of His anointed.

It is no longer the plaintive cry of a wounded woman's heart; it is a mother's jubilation, a believing woman's thanksgiving for answered prayer, a daughter of Abraham's joy over the hope of Israel. God's holy longing for the time of refreshing has gathered itself within Hannah's soul, and in true prophetic spirit she has, in the birth of Samuel, beheld a token of a new season for Israel.

The advent of a new age—a reformation, a revolution if one so will—Hannah proclaims in her song. As the first green shoot in spring bears tidings of thousands that shall follow; as the first leaf gives witness to the mighty powers which soon shall clothe the whole forest in a new

raiment; so Hannah sees in Samuel's birth and childhood a sign that the Spirit of the LORD is mightily stirring within the people of the LORD, and will work a renewal of the entirety of its national life. There is spring in the land, and spring-life in the people. Samuel is the first message of what is to come. We have seen the snow melt in the spring; and whereas before it lay cold and hard upon the grass-shoots, it now sinks down and gives moisture and sap to the roots, so that it must help forth the grass which it once held down.

Thus is the work of the Lord's Spirit in Israel. That which hitherto has stood highest and lain heavy and oppressive upon Israel's life shall be cast down and removed; but that which hitherto has been crushed and held in bondage, this will the Lord lift up and set free, so that with its new, young, fresh life it shall become a blessing for the people. Hannah sees in the Spirit how the strong and the rich, the satisfied and the proud, the insolent and boastful—who until now have been the leaders and oppressors of God's people—shall receive their judgment and be thrust aside to make room for the lowly and poor people, who, renewed and born again by the Lord's Spirit, shall go before in the struggle and lead it to victorious end. And the mighty stirring which the Lord will bring into the dead bones shall not cease until it transforms Israel into a kingdom. God's people, who for a long time have dreamed of a king who might gather the people into unity and guard its independence, shall now soon receive him; and anointed with the Lord's Spirit, he shall understand Israel's high calling and lead the people forward upon its appointed path.

This is ever the Lord's way. When human striving after height and power ends in inward hollowness and lifelessness; when the Spirit has departed from those who stand at the top and only the outward show remains, while the people gasp in deathly anguish for a little refreshment for their tormented hearts—then it is the Lord's hour to send, in merciful love, the fresh breath of the Spirit over the young and hope-weary hearts. Then He sends awakening among the people; and while the spiritless great men turn away with cold contempt from the call of the Spirit, the Lord kindles light round about in the hearts of the people. It is deemed fanaticism and folly; it is hated and persecuted, mocked and derided; yet it carries on its quiet growth to the full. The Lord's hour is near; and it comes with crushing judgment upon the crafty faces and the jubilant feasts and the mighty oppressors; yet it comes also with quiet peace and eternal honor for those who have learned to wait upon the Lord.

Many times has the Lord, through great and small alike, revealed Himself in this manner; but never with clearer hand than when He sent His Son into the world. That the lowly man from Nazareth with His poor Galileans should stir the world from one end to the other, undermine the mighty Roman Empire, and build His Church upon its ruins—this is the greatest and most glorious revelation of that law of God: the Lord bringeth low and lifteth up together. A

mightier empire has never been raised than the Roman; and greater misery and wretchedness than that of Galilee's poor, afflicted, leprous people has scarcely any seen. Yet from despised Galilee went forth the Word which overthrew the empire and built up the Church.

But Samuel was to be the instrument of a like work. Israel's people were to experience a spiritual awakening, which should transform both its inward and its outward condition. Base as Israel already was, it was to be brought yet lower. That which had become its pride and its vanity it should lose; yet in its uttermost need the Lord would prepare strength for it through Samuel's prayer. Then Israel, trampled down and crushed beneath its enemies, should rise up in the strength of its God and strike its foes back, blow after blow. As a lion should the Hero of Judah step forth against the enemies of God's people, and in confusion should they retreat before him.

Such was Hannah's bright hope and faith when she brought the heavy sacrifice of leaving Samuel behind at the sanctuary, while she herself departed quietly on her way. Were there more mothers like Hannah, there would also be more sons like Samuel.

For a mother's prayer availeth much; and Samuel, who was dedicated for his whole life with tears and with jubilation, should not put to shame the hope that was bound up with him. Of life he as yet understood only life's sorrow and life's joy; but there are dreams in the hearts of children which no one understands, and there are moments that make indelible impressions upon the young. Such a moment it must surely have been for the little boy, when his mother's holy enthusiasm shone upon him, and when he saw her so glad and so deeply moved. He may well have remained behind with childlike sorrow and fear; and yet he may also have forgotten his childish dread in the Lord's sanctuary, where he was left alone.

1.2.3 The Judgment upon the House of Eli

By Hannah's song of praise Samuel was consecrated to be a reformer in Israel. Yet a reformation has its preparation through long ages of abuse and spiritual deadness. When the commandment and the guilt in the existing order reach a certain boundary, and when corruption advances so far that it cries to heaven for vengeance, then the day of the Lord comes with crushing judgment upon the old. But reformation is not merely judgment upon the reigning corruption; it is also salvation and deliverance for that which has lain groaning and longing for the Lord's light and the life of the Spirit. Therefore a reformation has not only its negative preparation in ancient obstinacy and stiffening injustice; it has also its positive preparation in a people through the cry of oppressed and persecuted hearts for salvation, through longing for deliverance, through hope of brighter and better times. Judgment and

salvation, destruction and upbuilding, go hand in hand in the Lord's householding with His people; and it was not to be otherwise on this occasion.

Samuel had already in his home seen much of the good powers at work in the life of the people of Israel. There must have been peace and joy in his mother's quiet homestead; and the blessing she had experienced must surely have rested upon her whole life with thankfulness, and have laid piety's own imprint upon her entire being. A song of praise such as Hannah's does not well up from a false and impure heart, nor does it overflow from light-minded lips. The hidden man of the heart, in the incorruptible ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, must assuredly have been this woman's adornment. And Samuel, without knowing it, bore within himself the woman's inheritance from the mother who hoped in him to behold the Lord's instrument for the awakening of the people.

It is all the more grievous, with this thought of Samuel's home, to pass over to the consideration of the ungodliness with which Samuel was to become acquainted in the Lord's sanctuary. For from there the light of holiness and the life of love ought indeed to have streamed forth over the little people, who now by their spiritual strength were to raise their standing in relation to the mighty heathen nations that surrounded them on every side. From the sanctuary the Lord's truth and the Lord's Spirit should have gone out to all the scattered members of the congregation and bound them together into a living body. The bloody sacrifices were to be signs of atonement and reconciliation for the sinful people, while the priest's blessing was to follow them back into their daily labor and lay the Lord's power into their work. There, thought Hannah, the little Samuel must surely grow up amid pure and holy surroundings, where the child-heart's guilelessness and innocence would not be disturbed by the many temptations that a coarse popular life brought with it.

But it was not so in the Lord's sanctuary. Defiled and profaned was the house of God by those who were the Lord's priests and who by their calling ought to have been the light of the people. Old Eli himself had been a man of somewhat blameless conduct in his dealings. But stripped of the Spirit's power, and blind to the Lord's holiness and the people's need, he had not been able to stem the tide against the ever-growing corruption among the priests. His own sons became representatives of this spiritual decay in its most grievous embodiment.

It is sorrowful to say it; yet it is no less true, that the sons of Eli are not the only sons of priests, nor the only priests of their kind. It is dreadful for any house and for any man to be without the Spirit of God and without sincere fear of God; but it is, if possible, doubly dreadful for a priestly house and for a priest. For where the holy calling to be the Lord's servant is daily denied and daily violated by a profaning hand, there is gradually laid so thick

and close a shroud of corruption over heart and soul that at last it becomes an impossibility for the two-edged sword of the Word to pierce through and judge the thoughts and counsels of the heart. Where the holy calling is used merely as a means of gain, the spiritual power finally degenerates into an ungodly cowardice which stifles all spiritual influence. It is fairly well known also in the spiritual experience of our people, that the Lord's judgment has not spared ungodly and spiritless priestly houses; for Eli's fearful judgment, to behold his own weakness and slackness punished by the corruption and ungodliness of his sons, sounds a grave and piercing shout from the masthead⁵ to all who are the Lord's servants, that they be so in spirit and in truth, lest the judgment swiftly begin from the house of the Lord.

The sin of Eli's sons, their indulgence and sensual lust, was all the more detestable in that the Lord's sacrifices were thereby despised and the Lord's sanctuary profaned. Their father's reproof they treated with scorn, and the shame and pain which they inflicted upon the old man were to them a matter of indifference. All love and all right had to yield to their coarse and brazen craving for sensual pleasure. And Scripture adds a heavy, dreadful word: "They hearkened not unto the voice of their father, because the Lord would slay them." It is one of the mysteries of divine justice, that where the Lord's hour has come for judgment, there He lets sin pass over into hardening. Sin begets sin; one sin, as it were, forces forth the other; one link in the chain shackles to the next, and draws the sinner—first slowly, then more swiftly, at last without restraint—down into the abyss of perdition.

But Samuel's childlike mind remained uncorrupted by the foulness that surrounded him. And he grew in stature and in favor both with the Lord and with men.

Over the house of Eli the judgment drew near. The Lord did not leave him without warning. A prophet announced to Eli that the wrath of the Lord would come upon him and upon his lineage. If the priesthood had dishonored the Lord, then He would cause shame and disgrace to come upon the priesthood. That which He had set highest in the people of Israel, and made the true bearers of the whole of Israel's spiritual life, He would cast down into the deepest contempt and misery. The house of Eli would not die out; yet a faithful priest would take his place, and the wretched descendants of Eli's house would beg and implore him for a priestly office, that they might obtain a piece of bread to eat. As the sons of Eli had transformed the Lord's holy priestly office into a means of self-indulgent luxury and sensual pleasure, so in return the descendants of Eli would be made to experience the full bitterness of having to beg for a priestly office for the sake of hired bread. Eli himself was to behold the

⁵For this section, the term Varsko is rendered as a "shout from the masthead" to reflect its maritime origins and the seafaring culture of 19th-century Denmark. The use of "shackled" preserves the "Chain of Sin" motif, maintaining the rhythmic, "sung" quality of the original vertical imagery—contrasting the high calling of the Spirit with the inescapable descent into the abyss. — Present Ed

sign of this wretched future: his two sons would die in one day.

As Samuel grew, the rising contrast between what the priests were and what they ought to have been must have presented itself in sharp and glaring light to his childlike mind. There is nothing for which a child has a keener eye than hypocrisy and falsehood. None is more authoritative than a faithful and God-fearing child; and as the clearest mirror bears witness to every glance and desire in a human soul, so a child's soul, the purer and nobler it is, becomes all the more offensive to every form of dishonesty in its surroundings. With ever-deepening dread Samuel beheld the profanation of the Lord's sanctuary. Thus he was being prepared for the Lord's first revelation to him; for that revelation was to be a new warning of judgment upon the house of Eli.

Three times the Lord called to Samuel before Samuel, at Eli's bidding, answered: "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth!" Yet this was not only spoken from the depths of the young heart; it became as a constant and unceasing cry from Samuel's inmost soul throughout his entire subsequent life. Faithful, and even grave as he was, it became the earnest striving of his life to be open and receptive to the Lord's voice, to lay his ear to His mouth, to listen to His speech by day and by night, that he might become for his people a voice of the Lord, crying in the wilderness. As John the Baptist went before the Messiah, so Samuel went before the reign of David and Solomon with a clarion-cry of awakening. Samuel's first vision was a message of death over the house of Eli. Thus it was that the Lord would first reveal Himself in this time. With judging righteousness He would strike down that which was set in high station among His people; for His honor was violated by the ungodliness of the priests, and the people were led into dreadful labyrinths⁶ by those who should have been its leaders. Yet no one could well have foreseen in what strange manner the Lord would bring His counsel to fulfillment.

Samuel rose from day to day in the people's acknowledgment. His prophetic voice accomplished what no judge or hero had been able to accomplish since the death of Joshua. He gathered the whole people of Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, around his prophetic voice. This is his first great and significant work in Israel. Divided and torn as Israel was, Samuel's voice was nevertheless heard throughout the entire people. It was something altogether new in those days that all Israel should be gathered by a spiritual means and around a prophet of the Lord. Yet much was still lacking before Israel was wholly permeated by the Spirit of the Lord.

Yet it was an immediate reversal. It was not long since Samson had stood alone against the Philistines, yes, since even his own countrymen would have delivered him bound into the

⁶The term "labyrinth" for *Afveie* (literally "sideway" or "wrong paths") reflects the moral disorientation caused by corrupt leadership. — Present Ed.

hands of his mortal enemies. Now the whole of Israel gathered at Samuel's word for battle against the oppressors.

The encounter took place upon the ancient battlefield, where the Lord would later glorify Himself by hearing Samuel's prayer. But this time Samuel had gathered the people in order to let that let the hammer blow of judgment fall,⁷ forming the beginning of Israel's renewal. Israel was smitten with great loss, and now it was to be made manifest how far the priesthood of Eli and his sons had led the people away from a living knowledge of God.

For not in repentance and prayer, but in heathen superstition did Israel seek the help of its God. Not to the living God did they flee, but to the Ark of the Covenant, which they supposed would help by its outward presence. It had been given to Israel as a sign and as the nearness of the covenant. It bore within it the holy tables of the Law of old, hidden beneath the mercy seat, where the blood made atonement for Israel's sin. It was therefore a living witness that the glory of the Lord could dwell in the midst of a sinful people only through the mystery of atonement, and that broken and contrite hearts alone were sacrifices well-pleasing to the Lord. But this outward sign of the covenant did not bring a penitent and superstitious people into the Lord's good pleasure. Nowhere has Israel's spiritless reliance upon the outward signs of election revealed itself more clearly and more repulsively than in this holy matter, and it is impossible to conceive of a more dreadful judgment upon their heathen superstition than that which befell them.

The priesthood of Eli and his sons had, itself spiritless, hypocritical, and hollow, turned the people to regard the Lord's covenant sign with spiritless and profane hearts. They regarded the Lord as a God who, being dependent upon His people and His sanctuary, must help wherever His people with outward exactness observed the ordinances and ceremonies. And Israel had gone so far astray from the worship of God in spirit and in truth that it supposed that when the Ark of the Covenant was present, then the Lord was present. Much the same are those among the so-called Christians who imagine that outward ordinances and certain ceremonies and certain doctrines and similar outward forms will help them, while true spiritual fear of God and living devotion to Him are a matter of indifference to their hearts.

Israel fetched the Ark of the Covenant from Shiloh. With jubilation and joy it was received; with fear and terror the Philistines heard of its coming. Israel's God had so mightily revealed Himself in Israel's exodus from Egypt that the memory thereof still lived on among the heathen nations; and the Philistines feared that mysterious power which had once been so dreadful to mighty Egypt.

⁷The Danish 'Dom bryde ind' suggests a judgment breaking in or bursting through. I have rendered this as 'hammer-blow' to maintain the rhythmic force of the sermon. — Present Ed.

But the Lord would hold judgment. Heathen superstition, idolatrous reliance upon the outward sign of the covenant, the spiritually lifeless priesthood, and the profaned house of Eli were to receive their deserved recompense. The way was to be prepared for that spiritual knowledge of God which, through Samuel's awakening word, would fall as living seed into the hearts of the people and bring forth the noble fruits that lie before us in David's Psalms. From the coarsest outwardness to the deepest inwardness the way led only through a fearful judgment of the Lord.

The Ark of the Covenant was taken by the Philistines. It was a shattering blow to Israel's hollow worship of God. Their confidence and their strength were gone. The sons of Eli fell. Eli himself perished, unstrung⁸ by the horror of the calamity.

The mighty day of judgment ended with a heart-rending event which gathered into itself, as in a mirror image, all the features of Israel's misery. The wife of Phinehas was seized by terrible birth pangs at the tidings of disaster that came from the battlefield. She breathed out her life amid the agony and called her son's name Ichabod; for, said she, the glory has departed from Israel, for the Ark of God is taken.

The woman dying in childbirth, who seems to see all as lost, yet gives a son life in her hour of death. Thus sinks old Israel, the old time, into death, when the Ark of the Covenant and the priesthood are in one day trampled to dust; but a new Israel and a new time stand at the door; for the Lord lives, and Samuel is His Spirit-bearing instrument. As yet the new time is only as a newborn child, yes, as a child stirring in the womb⁹ in the eyes of men; but in its time it shall be seen that salvation and redemption sprout from the soil of judgment.

1.2.4 The Deliverance from the Philistines

The LORD judges His people; yet He does not bring shame upon His Name. The victory-proud Philistines returned home with the Ark of the Covenant: they believed that they had conquered both the people of Israel and its God. Meanwhile Israel sat in mourning and dejection, with tears in the eye and a heavy yoke upon its neck. It appeared as though all were lost—freedom, the land, the sanctuary, the worship of God, the Ark of the Covenant, the election itself. The great memories of the past were put to shame by the wretched present. Hope for the future had vanished. The glorious deliverance from the bondage of Egypt lay too far behind, and a humiliating diminution of the mighty past was Israel's allotted portion.

⁸The Danish 'gjennemrystet' means 'shaken through.' The term 'Unstrung' is used to reflect the total collapse of Eli's physical and spiritual frame at the news. — Present Ed.

⁹The Danish 'uroligt Foster' literally means a 'restless fetus.' In this homiletic context, 'stirring in the womb' captures the hidden, internal nature of God's new work before it is visible to the world. — Present Ed.

The holy tables of the Law, which were the pledge of God's covenant at Sinai and which so surely guaranteed Israel's future, were in the hands of the enemy. Had the word of the LORD become a lie, and the promises mere shadows, an empty sound upon the lips?

Such could not be. The truthfulness and faithfulness of the LORD, the honor of His Name and the earnestness of His love, could not perish; nor could the Philistines triumph over the Name of the LORD. While Israel, through Samuel's intercession, learned to serve the LORD in spirit and in truth, and gathered that inward strength which would soon cast off the outward yoke, the Philistines were to learn that it is perilous to lay violent hands upon the people of the LORD and upon that which is His.

Judgment had begun with Israel; it would soon strike down upon the Philistines. The Ark of the Covenant, which they had borne home in pride and triumph, quickly became their terror and dread. They set it within the temple of Dagon, and the idol fell down; they moved it from city to city, and sickness and misery followed in its wake. As the LORD in former times, through signs and wonders, made known to the Babylonian world-empire that He was not impotent, though His people had been carried away into exile, so also did the LORD work wonders in the cities of the Philistines, lest the heathen should exalt themselves and imagine that their gods were greater than the God of Israel. For the LORD willed not Israel's deliverance alone; He willed that Israel should be His servant unto the blessing of all peoples. Therefore it was as necessary that the nations should know His power as that Israel should know His mercy.

The Philistines knew of no other counsel than to send the Ark of the Covenant back again. Fear and terror had seized them, and they were compelled to seek to avert the wrath of Israel's God from their land. The conquered Israel was, by the power of its God, mightier than the victorious Philistines. Thus the Ark of the Covenant was sent home again in a wondrous manner; yet to the childless tabernacle at Shiloh it never returned. The Ark found no dwelling until David brought it into the new tabernacle which he raised on Zion, and from there it was at last carried into the temple which Solomon built.

Meanwhile Samuel labored in the backslidden and oppressed Israel. With hope against hope he must surely have struggled through the long twenty years that passed before he could once more gather Israel for battle against the oppressors. Yet the hand of the LORD was with him, and his prayers and cries did not meet deaf ears. Wretched Israel, the poor and misguided people, was nevertheless still the LORD's chosen, and the light of the promises was not extinguished.

Scripture is silent concerning this activity of Samuel; yet from its results we dare judge it, for

a people does not rise from bonds and chains of slavery unless strong spiritual powers renew its heart and mind. And Scripture bears witness that after the course of twenty years all Israel went sighing after the LORD. Truly, Samuel cannot have been inactive, nor can his labor have been unfruitful. And what had been accomplished in secret and in stillness was soon to be gloriously revealed.

There was a mighty contrast between that day when Israel, defiant and proud, took the Ark of the Covenant with them into battle and treated the LORD as an idol, and this day, twenty years later, when Israel, broken and penitent, cast away its idols at Samuel's word. And surely Samuel must have rejoiced in the Spirit on this great day of his life, when he summoned Israel to Mizpah, there to meet its God. With repentance in their hearts and confession of sin upon their lips, the diminished people gathered around their intercessor Samuel. Such a day a people does not experience many times. The people of God experienced once more a manly awakening, and unity and freedom were the fruits of that man for the people.

They experienced a salvation that recalled that glorious season of youth, when the Lord brought them forth out of the house of bondage. The Philistines, alarmed and embittered that the oppressed Israel dared once more to gather itself together, went up to smite the reconciled people and to crush its newly budding hope. They fought indeed against powers, though they perceived not the deep and hidden spiritual forces which now bound Israel to the Lord and united them into an unconquerable brotherhood.

Israel saw its ancient enemies draw near. Pride and haughtiness were gone; for they knew now better than ever how unworthy they were of the Lord's salvation. But Israel knew its true weapons, and from a thousand mouths it sounded forth to Samuel: "Cease not for us, and do not refrain from crying unto the Lord our God, that He may save us from the hand of the Philistines!" A people in distress, a people in repentance and faith, Samuel beheld around him; and his heart was lifted up in fervent prayer for the beloved Israel, and the Lord heard him.

Victory and triumph were the Lord's answer. The Lord fought for His people, and Israel shook the foreign yoke from its neck. Samuel was permitted to see how the spiritually awakened people, which had cast away its idols, now received freedom as a glorious gift upon the day of battle. Samuel's prayer had been Israel's weapon; and once again we perceive that above all else it was of consequence that the Lord should be known as He who hears prayers. The dead idols and the dead trust in the ark of the covenant were gone; the living, personal God, who suffers Himself to be found by penitent and broken hearts, revealed Himself gloriously upon the day of salvation. Samuel had been a witness to the awakening of the living knowledge of

God and the living fear of God, in opposition to idolatry and dead superstition; he had seen living faith bear the fair fruit of freedom for the people; well might he set up the memorial stone Eben-Ezer and say: “Hitherto hath the Lord helped!” A happier day no prophet has beheld in his people.

1.2.5 The Kingdom in Israel

Samuel had gathered Israel into a living unity through his prophetic word, by the awakening voice that recalled their calling and election. Samuel’s prayer had given Israel freedom and victory. Samuel administered justice for Israel and judged with incorruptible integrity. All went well, and Israel experienced a season—indeed a continuing season—such as it had perhaps never known since the day they entered the promised land.

But Samuel grew old. He appointed his sons as judges over Israel; yet his sons did not walk in his ways. When the sons came to stand on their own, they succumbed to the customary temptation of judges: they bent justice for gain and gift. It must have been hard for the aged Samuel thus to behold his sons turning aside from the path of righteousness and integrity.

The people looked toward the future with anxiety. So near had they come out of the rent and troubled time of the judges, so fresh was the memory of their distress and misery, that they shuddered at the thought that, at Samuel’s death, it should all begin anew. This could not be allowed; something had to be done to avert a repetition of the calamities and sorrows of the time of the judges. And Samuel’s labor had borne so much and such fair fruit that it could not be permitted to be lost. The solidarity and concord which Samuel’s life had called forth had to be preserved. A popular ripening had begun, the goal of which Samuel himself had already seen, and it could not be arrested.

The people came to Samuel and asked for a king. They regarded him as a father; they would not and could not pass him by. Yet their desire was not according to Samuel’s spirit. Their words, “Give us a king to judge us, like all the heathen nations,” did not please God’s prophet. There lay within them a worldly spirit and a misunderstanding of the glory of God’s people. The old prophet would so gladly have spared God’s people the bitter experiences which the monarchy would bring upon it; he had so earnestly wished that God’s people might answer to its calling and, in the freedom of the land, preserve its unity without being bound together by the coercion of kingship.¹⁰ The Lord was to be its King, the sanctuary its center, the word of the Lord its guide and rule, and the land itself its inner, binding power. He understood that the people desired a visible and tangible head to which they could look, and he understood

¹⁰In this context, “freedom of the land” refers to the theological ideal of the Covenant: a state where Israel is free from human tyranny because it is governed directly by God and His Law. — Present Ed.

that this was a step down from the height upon which the Law of Moses had sought to place the people. It lay heavy upon him that his labor should bear such fruit—that the people should long for a sensory, earthly kingship, when he had done all that stood in his power to teach them that the Lord was their King.

But Samuel did not act hastily or unreflectively in this matter; for he saw that a turning point had been reached in Israel's history, and that the decision on this occasion would become of far-reaching significance for the whole future. "And Samuel prayed unto the LORD." It was the LORD who must here give the answer, upon whose will everything depended. If He would allow that the people's fleshly craving for an earthly king and a visible head should be satisfied, then Samuel must needs submit himself thereto. And if the LORD had time to tarry yet a thousand years before the kingdom of the land with the infinite King should be established upon the earth, then Samuel must also be content to behold the hope of the promise lying far off, and greet it with trustful expectation.

And so it came to pass. The LORD had greater compassion for Israel's frailty than Samuel. All human impatience to behold at once the kingdoms of the Earthly Realm established was far from Him who knew so well that the time had not yet come; yet surely and calmly the fulness of time would dawn, when the kingdom of heaven with its divine Lord should be set up upon the earth. While the LORD waited, the people should have their will, and learn that though the earthly kingship might indeed accomplish much that was good, it was nevertheless not the true form of life for the people of God. And this new disappointment should prepare Israel for the kingdom of the Man, which the LORD in His own time would establish.

Therefore Samuel received the answer that the will of the people should be done. For although their desire was a misunderstanding of their spiritual calling and a rejection of the LORD, who was their rightful King, yet the people had not advanced in spiritual understanding, and they must learn by painful experience, since they would not suffer themselves to be instructed by the Word. And the LORD would take even this folly into His service, and cause rich spiritual instruction to flow to the people both through the glorious beginning of the kingship under David and Solomon, and through its lofty fall and humiliation under their successors.

But the people were not to remain merely in ignorance of what calamity they were bringing upon themselves. The people thought only of the firmness and unity, the peace and order, which the kingdom was to give. They knew well the firm and, as it seemed, immovable calm of which Egypt boasted in its famed constitution; they believed that through their kingship they would attain the same order. Samuel was to enlighten the people concerning

the shadow-sides of the kingdom, concerning what the outward unity would entail in the loss of popular freedom. Israel had hitherto possessed a half-patriarchal constitution with the most unchecked freedom; they would come to feel something very different when royal power should bind and constrain them together.

Samuel portrayed for the people “the manner of the king.” With sharp and striking strokes he showed how the people’s right and freedom and exalted independence would be violated and distorted by the kingdom. It was a voice that sought to guard the people’s freedom against the people themselves. But it availed nothing. The people had no ear for the dark shadow-sides of royal power; they looked only back upon the turmoil they had experienced in the time of the Judges, and they looked toward this new plan as toward a deliverance from all evil. They would and must have an earthly king, and they received him. The Lord let the people’s will come to pass; for only thus could they enter the heavy school which they needed, in order to understand that the Kingdom of God is not of this world, and that its King is not the ruler of power and bondage, but the mediator of peace and freedom.

Thus the kingdom in Israel arises by the will of the people; but the people’s earthly desire carries with it its own punishment in the diminution of freedom and the bondage of the world over God’s freeborn people. Therefore the Lord lets the people’s will come to pass; for what the people desire as their true end, that the Lord would make into a means of chastisement and preparation for the Kingdom of Man.

1.2.6 Saul and David

Valiantly had Samuel sought to stay the people’s desire to obtain a king. For he had seen that it was an attempt to render God’s people carnal, which must rob it of the freedom to which its high spiritual calling entitled it. And it seemed to him grievous that the people who had but now been led out from the bonds of superstition and the tyranny of a depraved priesthood should now be led into a new bondage through their own folly. He had hoped that the day of spiritual freedom would dawn through the prophetic word. But the people were not yet ready to carry through this spiritual conception of society, and the Lord’s hour had not yet come.

And even as manfully as Samuel had set himself against the desire of the people when he first heard it, so firmly and earnestly did he now set about the carrying out of the people’s resolve, when he understood that in this manner the LORD would lead His people into a new period of their development, in order thereby to prepare them for that fulness of time which Samuel believed already to be at hand. The aged prophet did not withdraw himself

dissatisfied and murmuring; but freely and vigorously he laid hold of the events which he would rather had never come to pass.

Saul was anointed king. From the lowly tribe of Benjamin, from the smallest tribe in Benjamin, himself an unknown and insignificant man, he was by Samuel known and acknowledged as the one whom the LORD had chosen to be prince over His people. It was in accordance with the LORD's wondrous rule, that what is lowly and of no account in the eyes of men, the LORD has chosen. Samuel spoke long and earnestly with the young man, who until then seems not to have harbored any serious thought in his soul. The solemn hour of the anointing became a decisive turning point in Saul's life; God changed his heart, and the Spirit of the LORD came upon him at the meeting with the prophets. Saul seemed destined truly to become a king after God's own heart.

Samuel assembled Israel; he once again set before them that they had rejected the invisible King, who had so mightily saved and helped them before. Yet this brought about no change in the people's decision, and the casting of lots decided who was to be king over God's people. Saul was taken.

As yet there was no one who truly knew what dwelt within him. He was soon to have opportunity to show it. And Samuel waited, until Saul was thus revealed and made known to the people, before relinquishing his office as judge. The Ammonite king Nahash mocked one of Israel's cities, and Saul gathered with haste, wisdom, and courage of Israel's men of valor, and within seven days he had an army in the field of three hundred and thirty thousand men, more than enough to bring to naught Nahash's barbarous threat.

Saul had manifested his royal gifts and his noble nature; all Israel paid him homage. Samuel could therefore with confidence lay down his office as judge and take leave of the people in that capacity. Such are they who, like Samuel, have held power and yet voluntarily made way for later times and younger men. Rare indeed is such moderation among men; for the usual course is that even capable and broad-minded men, in their old age, lose the ability to keep pace with the times and, with a withered spirit, remain fixed upon what they learned in a long-vanished youth, having nothing left but reproaches for the generation that grows away from them. Not so with Samuel. Though it pained him to see the kingship established in Israel, yet justice and truth commanded him to withdraw from a position in which he could only become an obstacle to the authority and influence of the new government.

Samuel desired to speak to the people one final time. Two things he sought to accomplish by his speech on this occasion. He would settle accounts with his people, take leave of them as a faithful servant from his lord; no misunderstanding should remain between them,

and no hidden injustice be left in any heart to embitter the old leader's declining years. In righteousness he would part in peace from the place he had filled with such great honor.

The second aim he set before himself was to bring the people to the recognition that it was sin that they had demanded a king, that it was a fall from the Lord's free grace, and that death and contrition before the Lord were the condition upon which the kingship could become a blessing to them. He would bow the heart and mind of his people, so that the kingship, which had been desired in sinful worldliness, might become a blessing to them by their receiving it in a godly spirit and with broken and penitent hearts. For it was not the kingship itself that was sinful; it was Israel that sinned by demanding an earthly kingdom when it had the Lord Himself as King and Savior. And if Israel could see its fall and begin anew to serve its way up again along the steep paths of Scripture toward spiritual communion with God, then all was gained that, for the present time, could be gained.

This was Samuel's greatest struggle and his greatest victory. His mighty words and his dreadful sign smote the people with fear and terror, with weeping and anguish. Samuel humbled their proud minds by showing that Israel's strife hitherto had been their idolatry toward the living God. In Egypt's bondage, in the again and again recurring apostasies and subjugations of the time of the judges, it had been distress and prayer that taught Israel to find salvation in the Lord, and so it would continue to be. The kingship would not alter the matter. And that ruinous thought of pride—that now they should be able to help themselves without God—that they had to relinquish, else it would become a new callousness upon them that they had a king in their midst.

Then as thunder upon thunder and rain in the time of wheat harvest unexpectedly accompanied Samuel's profound address, it became too much for the people. Had they truly forfeited their whole future? That thought struck their soul like lightning. And in distress and supplication they turned to Samuel: "Pray for thy servants unto the Lord thy God, that we die not; for we have added unto all our sins this evil, to ask us a king."

And Samuel could then speak words of consolation—"Fear not!"—to the anxious people. Despite all disobedience, there should yet be a way of salvation for Israel; for the Lord forsaketh not His people.

Thus Samuel's immediate aim was attained. The people went forward into the new age, which with the kingdom was to dawn upon them, with a God-fearing mind and a bowed heart.

But Samuel's labor was not ended. Israel had received a king, and Israel had bowed itself under the word of the Lord and accepted the king in sincere fear of God; yet the king himself

did not long remain obedient to the Lord. Saul's exaltation had come too swiftly; there was no corresponding humility in his soul. His first victories emboldened him, and instead of simple humility beneath the word of the Lord, he began to act willfully and in defiance. This could not be. That vigorous natural disposition, which through the Spirit of grace might have become so great a blessing to the people, became ungovernable and reckless in its frenzy. Samuel was compelled to make the grievous journey to Saul and proclaim to him that the Lord had rejected him:

Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry; because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, He hath also rejected thee from being king.

It was the final and unshakable decision, and despite all Saul's pleadings, the matter stood by this word. Samuel went home, heavy of heart and sorrowful, and he did not see Saul again until the day of his death. It had been a hard blow for the prophet, who so gladly would have seen the people spared the new trials and afflictions which were now unavoidable. But the Lord would not have it go so easily. There was a great and glorious future awaiting Israel; yet no great age is ever born save through great tribulations. The first attempt at kingship failed, and however grievous it is to behold a people's joyful expectations so swiftly shattered, there lay nonetheless in this chastisement a spiritual lesson for the nation: it was to gain a deeper insight into the mystery that the way of God's people to glory is a way of the cross and of thorns. Both Israel and Saul had striven too lightly and too hastily up to the heights, and they had lost a serious apprehension of the Lord's cause, in that they thought only of their own honour.

The Lord therefore had to choose a new man to be king, a man who in the hard school of suffering could learn to know his own heart and his God better than Saul; a man who, bowed beneath the cross, could grasp Israel's high calling without being exalted and puffed up with pride; a man who by the Spirit of the Lord could go before Israel's people and lead it forward on its way toward the promised goal of becoming a blessing to all nations. Samuel was to anoint David to be king after Saul. And once more it was the lowly who was exalted, and the despised who was taken into honour. And never has there been any earthly king who, like David, became a comforter of the wretched, a refuge time and again for the persecuted, a blessing to peoples in the most distant lands. Truly, a king for the people of the promise and in the spirit of the promise was the little David of the house of Jesse from Bethlehem. And had Samuel done only this one thing—in the clarity of the Spirit to go to Bethlehem and

anoint the great Psalmist-king, whose songs were to resound in the hearts of hundreds and millions—Samuel would be reckoned among the greatest in the history of God's people. And it has surely been, despite all the sorrow Samuel endured in his latter days over the fate of the poor, demented, and hardened Saul, an unspeakable consolation to him that David was the Lord's chosen, and that great promises followed him of brighter and better days for Israel.

It was Samuel's final act. He was to leave this great promise of the future to the people and to point forward toward happier times. He himself was not to experience them. He died before the struggle and the strife in Israel had yet come to an end. He was not to behold with his earthly eye the fair fruits of his labor and his sowing, as they so gloriously unfolded under David and Solomon. Yet so much will history with fairness say at his grave: What Samuel sowed in tears, Israel reaped with shouts of joy under the two great and glorious kings. The spiritually powerful element in Samuel's work was the foundation upon which David's kingdom was built, and the wellspring from which his psalmody drew its true life. Spiritual life, in opposition to dead worship of God and superstitious reliance upon the sanctuary and a crippled priesthood, was the standpoint of Samuel's life; it was the standpoint of all prophets, for it is the work of the Spirit of the Lord at every time. And Samuel is, after Moses, the first and greatest prophet in Israel.

Once more Samuel's voice is heard in night and darkness from the realm of death and the land of the grave, speaking to the hardened Saul. Or was it not Samuel's voice that sounded on that dreadful night at Endor, when Saul's embitterment turned into despair and hopeless terror? No one knows; for the secret of death no mortal has fathomed. Better to listen to the living prophetic voices than to brood over the sinister enigmas which the realm of death presents to us. Better to follow the call that awakens us to living faith and vigorous labor for the Lord's cause and His people. Better to follow Samuel's example in struggle and in prayer for the life of the land and the freedom of the land.



1.3 The Prophet Jeremiah

Source: Quarterly Writings. Third Year. 1877. Pages 113–137. — Ed. 1.

This section appears on pages 36–57 of the original volume. — Present Ed.

The prophets of the Old Covenant are the great and glorious privilege of the people of Israel, grounded in this, that Israel was the people of God. For it is the privilege of God's people that the Word of God is entrusted to them; but the distinctive mark of the prophets, that which makes them to be called prophets, is precisely this, that the Word of the Lord came unto them, and that they proclaimed it to the people. A concept may indeed be formed of what a prophet is, yet none is simpler than this: "A Prophet will I raise up unto them from among their brethren, like unto thee; and I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him" (Deut. 18:18).

God's wondrous counsel of salvation with His people and with the world—that is God's thought; and because the thought of the Lord is higher than the thought of men, therefore it must be revealed in the Word of the Lord. There may be many deep thoughts of men and many lofty human plans, but that which the natural man does not comprehend is this, that the way of life passes through death, both for the individual and for the people. It is the Lord alone who has conceived it, it is the Lord alone who has understood it, and it is the Lord alone who has wrought the salvation of His people by smiting sin and scattering the sheep, by crushing unto death the Prince of Life.

—It is this way of salvation which the prophets are to proclaim to the people. The people believe it not, and their hardening becomes one of the means in the hand of the Lord whereby His plan is fulfilled. —The people believe it, and the faith of the people becomes another means for the advancement of the Lord's will; for

What counsel He chooses to perform,
It stands as firm as mountains stand,
And this He surely shall perform,

Though earth and heaven should burst.

God's counsel of salvation is accomplished in Israel, whose entire veiling points toward one single goal, Jesus Christ, in whom the counsel of salvation is brought to completion in the fullness of time. Yet as the people of Israel drew nearer to the fullness of time, it was prepared through the Lord's manifold acts of deliverance, so that it might rightly receive the Savior—or reject Him and give Him the death of a criminal—just as love had resolved, and as love alone could bring to pass. He is the true Israel; He is the Seed, Abraham's Seed—not many, but one: Christ.

And as the people advanced ever nearer to the fullness of time, so the word of the Lord followed them by the mouth of the prophets, explaining to the people how far they had come, and what the next step would be in the preparation, so that those who did not believe might fill up the measure of their hardening, and those who believed might abide in patience and attain the goal of their faith. Thus the prophetic word is the light and the truth upon the people's path, pointing toward the goal, while at the same time powerfully and effectually leading the people forward toward that goal.

Every people has its calling in God's economy. A people may despise its calling, and it perishes; yet even through its perdition it must serve the counsel of the Lord. A people may honor its calling and walk worthy of it; then it is saved, and in being saved it serves the counsel of the Lord willingly. But since both the one who perishes and the one who is saved must serve the Lord, it is no merit for you that you fulfill the counsel of the Lord with all your strength. You have nothing of which to boast; rather you must thank the Lord for everything, for you are only an unprofitable servant, because you did what you were bound to do.

The people of Israel also had its calling. It was to be a holy people, a chosen people, a people for possession, in whose midst the Lord would dwell, that He might be their God, and they His people. But in this Israel stood under the same two dangers that confront everyone whom God has called. The one is to be unfaithful in one's calling, not to esteem it high and holy as coming from the Holy One; the other is to boast of one's calling, or to misunderstand it, and from it seek to make oneself a merit. Against these two dangers the prophets must testify and contend.

On high the prophet lifts the people's calling and its goal. In sharp, mighty words he speaks to the aimless, wavering, halting people of the Lord's great calling which He gave them, of the great and glorious future which He prepared for them. And with flashing words, full of

divine wrath, he strikes down the people's proud delusion that it already is the Lord's people merely by right of birth. With burning zeal for the truth he repeats again and again the warning that the people must not forfeit its glorious future through the miserable delusion that it has already reached the goal and may now begin to enjoy its peace. And because it is always so that many are called but few are chosen, and yet the zealous priests would draw all to themselves, therefore the prophets are full of the hidden ways of God and of afflictions, and of sharp threats and judgments; for as high as the Lord's mercy is, so high is His righteousness, and if sinners will not immerse themselves in the one, they shall surely be overthrown and crushed by the other.

There are, then, three things in which the work of the prophets is gathered together. It is the revelation of God's counsel of salvation, the final, eternal deliverance from the bondage of sin. Next, it is the preparation of the people to receive the coming Savior. Finally, it is the early and unceasing task of reminding the people of their calling, and again and again to warn: "Take heed, return!"—to all apostate and stubborn children.

"And we have the prophetic word made more sure, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the Day-star arise in your hearts" (2 Peter 1:19). Thus the Apostle Peter exhorts us. And the Christian congregation ought indeed far more diligently to follow this exhortation, and to use the prophetic word for its edification. For it is the promise of Abraham which has now come, and daily comes, to all peoples; it is the hope of Israel which is now being fulfilled from day to day. There is still a coming of Christ in the hearts, for which they are prepared by the Word of the Lord; it is still necessary to cry out: "Turn ye, my fallow ground, and go down no longer into the thorns"; and there is still a holy calling which goes forth to all lost sons and daughters in the whole of humanity: "Turn ye unto me, and I will turn unto you!"

But the prophetic word is greatly neglected among us, and thereby we have lost much power and boldness; thereby we have forgotten the great and holy goal which God's Word has set before us: "Ye shall be my people, and I will be your God." We have become apathetic and sluggish to spread God's Word, because we have forgotten the calling—that the Lord wills that through us the Gospel of the Kingdom should be proclaimed in all lands and in all tongues. We have forgotten that "in the last days the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it."

If it might be possible to spur one or another to more diligent use of this blessed Word, and thereby to gain comfort and boldness in these evil days, when the congregation seems destined

to perish, because the chief priests and Herod and Pilate have again joined together against it; if it might be possible to strengthen the congregation in its despair unto a final victory over all its enemies; if it might be possible to cry “Repent!” into a rotting Christendom—then we will attempt to give a small glimpse into the life of the prophet Jeremiah and his book. And we believe that if anyone should allow himself to be moved to read and ponder this prophet of sorrow and affliction, he would experience that where the Word of the Lord crushes and smites, there it also raises up and heals.

1.3.1 Israel’s People in the Time of Jeremiah

The fair vine which the Lord had planted in the land that flowed with milk and honey was at this time already grievously laid waste. In the victorious and peaceful days of David and Solomon it had struck its roots deep and spread itself wide; it had sent forth its branches unto the sea and its shoots unto the river. But now its walls were broken down; all that passed by plucked at it. Its crown and trunk were felled to the dust, and one part was hewn off and cast far away beyond the Euphrates. The kingdom of Israel was no more; and the kingdom of Judah, which still remained, was like the vine that beareth no grapes: there is no joy in it and there is no profit in it; it yieldeth no wine, and its wood is good for nothing. The kingdom of Judah stood straining and waiting for the axe which had cut down the kingdom of Israel to be lifted a second time and to fall dripping upon the golden tendrils.

The kingdom of Israel had never had any better future in store for it from the day when it said, “What portion have we in David? we have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents, O Israel! now see to thine own house, David.” By this it had entered upon the path of decay; it had reckoned itself among the heathen nations and had thus voluntarily chosen the portion of the heathen, which is death by the power of the kingdoms of this world. The kingdom of Judah, on the other hand, had better ordinances and better hope; for the house of David had the promise of abiding for ever, and the temple of the Lord had the promise that it should become a house of prayer for all peoples. And the word of the Lord dwelt in Judah, and was God’s power and cleaving-wedge for the little afflicted people who from the valleys of Judah went up to Jerusalem, the lofty-built city upon the mountains, round about which the Lord was wall and rampart, the wondrous city in which the nations should be born anew.

But in Judah everything depended upon this one thing—upon faith. “If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established.” Human malice could not make void the faithfulness of God; but if Judah would not believe, would not drink of the fountain that giveth strength unto everlasting life, then must the crushing judgment pass over the people of hardening.

And thus it came to pass. The kingdom of Judah set its neck and a hardened heart against the word of the Lord; therefore the word of the Lord became a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces. Hardening and destruction follow one another as death and corruption.

There is a place in the word of God which sets before us this inevitable connection between hardening and corruption; it is the sixth chapter of the prophet Isaiah. In the year of King Uzziah's death the prophet receiveth this command: "Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed." Then said the prophet, "Lord, how long?" And he answered, "Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate; and the Lord have removed men far away, and there be a great forsaking in the midst of the land." From this hour onward, the growing hardening and the judgment that draweth ever nearer and nearer are the history of Israel. The growing hardening is this, that the word of the Lord soundeth early and earnestly and is not heeded; the advancing judgment is this, that the birds of prey of the world-kings gather more and more closely over the stiffened carcass of the kingdom of Judah. The Lord suffered both to come to pass. He sent His prophets early and earnestly unto a rebellious people; and as ungodliness increased, He raised up the mighty kingdoms of the world, the rod of His wrath over the nations, and above all over the chosen people.

The prophet Isaiah lived after the death of Uzziah, under three kings—Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah—and in this period two wondrous events occurred which, by righteous steps, led the people of Israel toward their appointed end.

The first is this: that Ahaz would not believe the word of the Lord nor the help of the Lord against the kingdom of Israel and Syria, who had attacked him (Isa. 7); but instead he entered into alliance with the Assyrian world-empire, which came and destroyed the kingdom of Israel and overflowed Judah, until it reached even unto the neck. The second is this: that Hezekiah believed the help and the word of the Lord against the Assyrians and was delivered from death; yet soon thereafter he drew so near to Babylon in friendship that the Lord proclaimed that Babylon should become the rod of chastisement over Judah.

After Hezekiah followed his son Manasseh, who reigned over Judah for fifty-five years and, during this long reign, brought Judah's sin to its full measure, so that the people, thoroughly permeated by idolatry favored from above, became utterly corrupted and could no longer be cleansed except through judgment. Yet the mercy of the Lord was not exhausted; for though the people of Judah could not be saved, the remnant of Judah could yet be plucked as a

burning brand out of the fire.

Therefore, even after the death of Manasseh, counseling prophets still went forth to the people; and after the ungodly reign of Amon there came yet a revival under King Josiah.

He was eight years old when he became king, and when he was sixteen years old he began to seek the Lord. He turned himself to God, and since his heart had been made steadfast in the fear of God, he began, at twenty years of age, a reformation in his kingdom—a cleansing from idolatry. He tore down all the images of idols, overthrew their altars, and forbade their sacrifices throughout the realm.

The following year Jeremiah was called to be a prophet, and his mighty revival preaching supported the king's reformation. Six years passed, and then another remarkable event strengthened still further the cry, "Awake!" to the sleeping people: the Book of the Law was found by the priest Hilkiah. It was brought to the king and read before him, and it filled him with the deepest sorrow, because the people were so far from the goal of the Law. Then he assembled all the people and made a covenant with them, that from that time forth they should keep the Law of the Lord.

And Jeremiah went about in Jerusalem and in all the cities of Judah and proclaimed, by the command of the Lord: "Hear the words of this covenant, and do them" (Jer. 11:6). And thereafter Josiah kept the Passover with the whole people—a Passover such as had never been kept since the days of the Judges.

It was a wondrous season of stirring in the kingdom of Judah in the days of Josiah, and the Lord called to His people with a entreating voice: "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil way!" But the people would not. They said, "It is in vain; for we will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the stubbornness of his evil heart."

And whereas in the days of Josiah all things seemed to call the people to repentance and to lift them up unto the LORD, so after his death it was as though everything joined together to drive the people inexorably forward toward the goal of their hardening and their corruption. There arose ungodly kings, self-righteous priests, and false prophets. And while the kings turned themselves away from the LORD and sought help from the powers of the world, the priests cried out, "The temple of the LORD," and the prophets cried, "Peace, peace, and no danger," until the poor people, who had been sold over to destruction, slept and slumbered sweetly upon the heavy quilts of security and carelessness, so that they slept away their right and their calling. They shut their eyes to the danger, until suddenly destruction stood over them, as travail upon the woman with child.

Thus matters stood inwardly. Priests, prophets, and kings hollowed out the marrow of the people, until it was like dead flesh without heart, without courage, without faith—a helpless mass, whose secret allegiance most often inlined toward its enemies. And those—yes, those—to whom Judah in haste and in helplessness had bound itself, it had fastened itself to them all. Judah had sought Egypt for help against Assyria, Assyria for help against Egypt, Babylon for support against them both. Now they came upon Judah, whom they all despised. Assyria had already, under Hezekiah and Manasseh, flooded the land of Judah, because it despised the softly flowing waters of Hezekiah (Isa. 8:6–8). Egypt became the instrument that brought death upon the last king of David’s faith, Josiah, in the crushing battle at Megiddo; and Babylon brought the judgment of destruction and of exile to its deepest depth: the holy city became a heap of rubble, while the temple went up in flames.

Meanwhile, in the far East, the foundation was being laid for the kingdom that was to break Israel’s bonds and cast down proud Babylon. The sword-bearing, warlike Persians prepared themselves for conquest against the southern builders of Babylon, enfeebled by debauchery and luxury.

1.3.2 The Prophet’s Life

Jeremiah was born in the small village of Anathoth, which lies about four English miles northeast of Jerusalem, in the tribe of Benjamin. Being of priestly birth, he had from his youth onward abundant opportunity to hear the Word of God and, at least according to the letter, to learn to know God and His deeds in Israel, and to become familiar with the service of the Temple. He likewise had the best opportunity to observe both how the Temple of the LORD and His priests were despised and mocked under Manasseh, and how the priests, when Josiah began his reformation, sought to draw to themselves power and advantage from Josiah’s work, as a kind of compensation for what the idolatry of Manasseh had taken from them. Otherwise we know nothing of his life before he was called to be a prophet. This altogether decisive event in his life, which made him a man of affliction and suffering from the time when his countrymen in Anathoth sought to slay him (Jer. 11:21) until he sat weeping among the ruins of Jerusalem—this heavy calling of the LORD came to him in the thirteenth year of Josiah. The reformation which had begun in the twelfth year of Josiah, when the king himself had been awakened, had indeed also been a preparation for Jeremiah for his calling. From this time forth he was to become the true awakening prophet in Judah. For hymns and laws might well be able to foster outward conformity with the Law; but the Word of God alone could pierce the hearts.

And while the king had the comparatively easy task of breaking down idols and restoring the

Temple service in its purity, Jeremiah received the arduous and painful task of bearing witness before the people, the priests, and the princes that, unless their hearts were broken in pieces by the Word of God, the Temple was to them nothing but an idol, and self-righteousness nothing but a worse apostasy than any other. And all the heavier did the prophet's labor become, because he spoke to deaf ears and daily saw a beloved people draw near to their destruction by trusting, in the midst of their ungodliness, in the great outward change which had taken place through Josiah's reformation.

There are two things in the calling of the prophet Jeremiah to which we draw attention. The first is that he is appointed as a prophet to the nations (Jer. 1:5). Nothing is more surprising than this. For to the Jews the Word of God had indeed been given; to them, according to God's promise, the prophets were to be sent; and yet here Jeremiah is set as a prophet to the nations, a designation which includes both Jews and Gentiles without distinction.

There is only one other Prophet in the Old Testament who was not sent to the Jews, and his sending also is exceedingly wondrous; yet it serves to cast light upon the calling of Jeremiah. This is the Prophet Jonah, who is sent to Nineveh, and who, however unwillingly he goes, must nevertheless at last come thither.

Jonah was sent to the great city, which was the Lord's instrument of punishment over the kingdom of Israel, with this brief preaching: "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (Jonah 3:4). But Nineveh repented in sackcloth and ashes, and God had compassion upon the world-city and allowed it to endure yet a little time. This was the first great sign which the Lord set before His people, whereby He bore witness to them that there is no difference between Jew and Gentile; for all have sinned. Therefore the one stands just as much under God's judgment as the other. But when the Ninevites repented, then God set His sign of mercy and pointed toward the mystery which is revealed in Christ: that God hath shut up all under sin, that He might have mercy upon all. And there is no difference between Jew and Greek; but apart from the Law the righteousness of God is revealed through faith in Jesus Christ, unto all and upon all that believe.

But the more the Jewish people, by their sin and stubbornness, placed themselves on a level with the Gentiles, the more decisively did the Lord testify to them that they who were equal in sin should become equal in punishment. And all the more clearly did He also make it known among men that they who had become equal in brokenness under God's judgment, they should become equal in restoration by God's grace, if they called upon the Lord in their day of distress. Therefore Jeremiah, who in this manner must walk sorrowing behind the funeral-bier of his people, is already in his very calling appointed as prophet over the nations

and over the kingdoms (Jer. 1:10).

In the closest connection with the fact that Jeremiah is thus made the prophet of the nations and of the kingdoms stands the other remarkable feature of Jeremiah's calling. For he is set over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out and to pull down and to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant. It is first and foremost four strong and mighty words of demolition that designate the prophet's work, and thereafter two words directed toward healing, which express his labor of edification. For the reason that the nations and the kingdoms (among which the people of Israel are also included) are placed under Jeremiah's prophetic hand lies herein, that they have now filled up the measure of their sins, and therefore must all drink the cup of wrath which the prophet hands them from God. But then it is indeed destruction that stands nearest at the door. God cannot come with His kingdom and His people except where the other kingdoms and peoples are crushed and brought low; and God cannot come with healing and life where there is not sickness and death. He kills in order to make alive. Yet since God wills not the death of any sinner, but that he should turn and live, therefore no prophet is appointed solely to tear down; but even for Jeremiah, who received the heaviest task of all the prophets, even for him it was added that he should build and plant. And as he had to proclaim judgment and ruin both upon Jerusalem and upon Babylon, so he was also granted to bear witness to grace and restoration both for Israel and for its enemies, when the Lord had broken their hearts.

Hereby the prophet Jeremiah was consecrated to be a preacher of repentance, a prophet of peace. But he was also consecrated to be a man of sufferings, a man of contradictions. For he who was to strike down all that upon which Israel relied, and to deprive it of all repose, so that it became poor as a heathen people, he had to endure all the hatred and persecution of those who imagined themselves to be something. Yet in all his suffering and in all persecution he was to have a firm refuge, a citadel of deliverance in distress: the Lord, the God of Israel. Therefore, on the day of his calling, he was given with him that rock-firm word which could not fail: "And I, behold, I make thee this day a fortified city, and an iron pillar, and brazen walls against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, against its princes, against its priests, and against the people of the land. And they shall fight against thee, but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee, saith the Lord, to deliver thee." (Jer. 1:18-19).

Thus the Prophet went forth in his calling, frail, gentle, and fearful according to the flesh, yet strong in the power of the Lord. He was appointed to tear down peoples and kingdoms by his word. He was to proclaim unto them the crushing judgments of God and to be a witness to their fulfillment; but above all he was to overthrow the mighty fortresses which his own

people had set between themselves and their God through the stubbornness of their own hearts and their trust in false and insidious words.

We have already said that Israel, under the reign of Josiah, passed through a remarkable season of agitation, and the Prophet labored with burning zeal in that time. The first false ground of consolation against which he lifted the hammer of the Word was Judah's confidence that it had survived the kingdom of Israel, which had fallen before the power of Assyria. Judah believed itself more secure than her sister Israel; but the Prophet tore away this deceitful comfort and declared that the kingdom of Judah had doubled her sin, for Judah beheld her sister's fate, and yet did not repent. This was to wound Judah's pride at its most tender point; for Judah had imagined that Israel had fallen because she had attacked Judah, and it was commonly believed in Judah that her own sin was still less than that of her sister. Therefore the people were embittered against the Prophet, who spoke so freely the word of God, and they would not listen to the man who called them to repentance.

The priests had gained much outwardly through Josiah's reformation. Their position was strengthened and honored, and the service of the temple was restored; but their hearts were little bowed. For thus Jeremiah bears witness concerning them: "The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule at their direction; and my people love to have it so" (Jer. 5:31). This brief saying opens for us a deep insight into the true condition of things. The prophets proclaimed, Peace! Peace! and healed the hurt of the daughters of Israel lightly; for there was no peace, but the judgment of God's wrath. And the priests took advantage of the prophets' reckless doctrine of consolation. They confirmed the false prophecy with the lying word: "The temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD are these" (Jer. 7:4). As though they would say to the people: So long as the temple is in our midst, we cannot perish; make your gifts great and your sacrifices many, and it shall go well with you.

Then the Prophet arose in burning zeal, and, according to the word of the LORD, stood in the gate of His house and cried out to all Judah: "Trust ye not in lying words. This house have ye made a den of robbers; and behold, as Shiloh, where I dwelt, which is now desolate and forsaken, so shall my house become." From that day the priests, whose heart's pride was the temple, became Jeremiah's enemies; for he had torn down their stronghold. And they would not hear the call of the LORD: Repent ye.

Nor did it go any better with the false prophets. The tangled snare of their pride was their reckless cry: Peace! Peace! They gave themselves out to proclaim the truth of God; then came the Prophet of truth, sent by God, and without mercy he tore the mask from their hypocritical face and bore witness to them with the word of the LORD: "Hearken not unto

the prophets that prophesy unto you, and make you vain; they speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the LORD” (Jer. 23:16). “Behold, I am against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the LORD, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their light-mindedness; yet I sent them not, nor commanded them: therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the LORD” (Jer. 23:32).

Then there arose a bitter hatred against Jeremiah in the hearts of the prophets, because their pride had been broken. And they would not hear the grace of God: Repent ye!

So long, however, as King Josiah lived, Jeremiah was relatively secured against the malice of his enemies. But Josiah fell in the battle at Megiddo; and after Joahaz had reigned three months and, according to Jeremiah’s prophecy, had been carried away to Egypt to die there, then came the wretched reign of Jehoiakim, in whose time the king himself also became the prophet’s enemy. For in his fourth year the prophet delivered that mighty discourse which is written in the twenty-fifth chapter of his book. In that same year Nebuchadnezzar became king in Babylon, and the prophet declared plainly that because Israel for three-and-twenty years had heard the counsel of the LORD through him, early and unceasingly, yet would not turn again, therefore Nebuchadnezzar should come, and Judah and all the surrounding nations should serve the king of Babylon for seventy years.

Then should the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp vanish from Judah, and the land become a desolation and its cities ruins. Then neither should the temple of the LORD avail them who trusted that they were the chosen people of the LORD; nor should alliances with foreign princes avail them who held flesh for their arm; but all supports should break, for the hour of the LORD was come. His cup filled with the wine of wrath was full, and the prophet must now take it and bring it to all the nations upon whom the judgment came. But Jerusalem must drink first; for with His own city would the LORD begin.

Thus Judah was made equal with the heathen. Thirty years of hardening had filled the measure. And then also the embitterment against Jeremiah arose. The priests and the prophets and the people laid hold on him and said: This man is worthy to die, for he hath prophesied against this city (Jer. 26:11). But this time the princes delivered him. And yet in that same year Jeremiah wrote all his prophecies in a book, and it was brought to King Jehoiakim; and he read it, and when three or four leaves had been read, the king took the scribe’s knife and cut them asunder and cast them into the fire and burned them. And he commanded that Jeremiah and his faithful scribe Baruch should be seized; but the LORD hid them.

And Jeremiah, who had overthrown both the king's fleshly policy and his fleshly reliance upon the promise of David's eternal kingdom, Jeremiah could now number the kings also among his enemies.

What had not his faithful heart suffered under this! Day by day he saw his people draw nearer to their destruction; he saw the love of his God, which without ceasing called and allured them unto repentance and salvation, mocked and despised; he himself was persecuted, and saw his life threatened daily by people and priests, by prophets and princes. — And his soul was beaten down in the trial, so that he cursed the day on which he was born. Yet still he was constrained to go with the message of the Lord's wrath; for if Israel would not be broken by the word of the Lord, then it must be broken by the judgment of the Lord. That judgment was near; Jeremiah was to live to behold it.

The last king before the captivity to Babylon was the weak and faithless Zedekiah. It was Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, who, after having carried away Jehoiakim and the best of the people with him, set Zedekiah as king over those who remained in Jerusalem. Zedekiah had sworn loyalty and faithfulness to the king of Babylon, and the kingdom of Judah was tributary to the world-empire. Jeremiah bore witness to the people to the same truth which the Savior later set before Israel, when it was subject to the Roman emperor: "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's." But to no avail. Zedekiah trusted in political cunning and made flesh his arm. He entered into alliance with several other petty princes, who like himself were subject to Babylon; and in reliance upon the help of Egypt, he and his confederates broke their oath of loyalty to Nebuchadnezzar, refused to pay their tribute, and set themselves in a posture of defense against the advancing army of Babylon.

Then Jeremiah lifted up his voice in rebuke. As a prophet of the Lord he had borne witness to the people before the uprising and had said: Serve the king of Babylon, and ye shall live (Jer. 27:17). And after the uprising, when the king of Babylon and all his army came to fight against Jerusalem, then his word sounded thus: "Thus saith the Lord: Behold, I give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire" (Jer. 34:2). But Israel would not hear. The people were seized with fear for a little while when the mighty army appeared before the walls of Jerusalem, and in their terror they resolved to release their Hebrew menservants and maidservants, in order thereby to appease the Lord's wrath and to increase the number of their fighting men. But this was only a work of fear, not of faith; and therefore, when Nebuchadnezzar for a little while withdrew from Jerusalem to meet the Egyptian army, which had indeed gone out against him, then the Jewish masters took back their word and once again deprived their servants of their freedom.

Then the wrath of the Lord was kindled against them, and he sent Jeremiah to say: Ye have proclaimed liberty to your servants, and have taken back that liberty; therefore will I proclaim liberty for the sword, and for the famine, and for the pestilence, to rage among you. And I will bring the army of the Babylonians back unto this city, and they shall fight against it, and they shall take it and burn it with fire; and the cities of Judah will I make a desolation, without inhabitant (Jer. 34).

And the army of Nebuchadnezzar came, never again to depart from Jerusalem until it had been made a heap of ruins. But if the bitterness against Jeremiah had been great while he proclaimed the sentence of punishment, it became doubly violent when the judgment came. It is the dreadful mystery of hardening, that the more clearly the truth shines before the eyes, the more firmly the eye closes itself against it; the heavier the hand of the Lord lies upon it, the more stiffly it raises its neck against the hand that strikes it. And when Jeremiah spoke to the besieged people of the salvation that lay in the humiliating way of surrendering themselves to the king of Babylon, then he could no longer be endured; he had to be bound and cast into prison. And as though it were not enough that he was shut up, the princes would yet take his life by casting him into an empty cistern, where, sinking down into the mire, he was to find death by hunger.

But the Lord had promised to deliver him out of the hand of his enemies; and Ebed-melech obtained from the king permission to rescue him from the pit. And in prison he was forced to remain until the day when Jerusalem was taken.

Wondrous are the ways of the Lord. There in the prison, where Jeremiah seemed to human eyes truly laid away in darkness, there the Lord caused His light to arise for him and showed him Israel's glorious future. From prisons there commonly go forth the wildest threats against the people, curses against God and men; but from this prison there go forth the most life-blessed promises in lovely words, which still gladden the city of God.

Jeremiah, who in the prison waited for the fulfillment of the destruction he had proclaimed, received precisely there also the charge to build and to plant. In the prison Jeremiah was commanded to buy a field which lay trampled beneath the feet of the Chaldeans, a piece of land near Jerusalem, as a sign that when the Chaldeans had destroyed everything, then the Lord would restore everything; that out of death itself the Lord would bring forth life. After this bitter winter there was to break forth a glorious spring.

In the prison Jeremiah received the word of the Lord, that the Lord would gather His people from all the lands to which He had scattered them, and bring them back to this place and cause them to dwell securely. And they should be the Lord's people, and He their God. And

they should be given one heart and one way.

In the prison Jeremiah received that glorious message: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will perform that good word which I have spoken concerning the house of Israel and concerning the house of Judah. In those days, and at that time, will I cause the righteous Branch to spring forth unto David; and He shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land. In those days shall Judah be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely; and this is the name whereby it shall be called: The Lord our Righteousness."

Thus Jeremiah built and planted a people and a kingdom which should endure forever, in the midst of the ruins of fallen kingdoms and shattered peoples. And in the prison, where the narrow walls shut him in on every side, the prophet's eye was opened to see unto the last days and unto the farthest ends of the earth, unto the kingdom which by the Gospel comes to all nations.

Thus the prison had, in a spiritual sense, been a season of rest for the Prophet from his struggle with the hard and rebellious people. Yet he was not finished. His imprisonment was indeed broken open by the Chaldeans, and life and freedom were offered him with those who were carried away to Babylon. But Jeremiah chose to remain behind in the devastated Judah and to labor among the wretched remnants of the people, if perchance a soul might be saved. The Lord had sent to the captives another mighty Prophet for awakening and consolation, the Prophet Ezekiel. Jeremiah remained with the scattered people in Judah, over whom the king of Babylon set Gedaliah as governor. But even now he was not permitted to live in peace. Certain robbers, led by Ishmael, slew Gedaliah, and the people fled in terror to Egypt and forced Jeremiah to go with them. There also he continued to bear witness to them that the Lord's punishment would come upon them for their unfaithfulness and idolatry. His death is unknown, but an ancient tradition says that he was stoned by his own countrymen.

Such is the life of the man who received the heaviest prophetic calling, and who saw Jerusalem's last days before the exile. No prophet is so much as he a pattern of the suffering servant, who was required to proclaim to the Israel hardened a second time that Jerusalem and the Temple should be laid waste, until there was not one stone left upon another, because it knew not the time of its visitation. But from the life of this man of God there goes forth a crying voice to all who are set as watchmen upon Zion's walls: Be faithful in the Lord's work and stand manfully upon your watch; for the Lord will require the blood of His people at the hand of the unfaithful watchmen. And there is a cry of awakening to all dead Christians: Trust not in lying words! Harken not to priests who cry, "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these," nor to prophets who cry, "Peace! Peace! and no danger." Turn ye, turn ye!

Stand in the Ways and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. Behold, the Way, Jesus Christ, is revealed unto us; God grant that none may harden themselves and say, We will not walk therein. For the Lord's judgment is near to be revealed, and from the house of God it shall begin.

1.3.3 Jeremiah's Book

In the Old Testament there is told of many Prophets who lived and labored in Israel, yet who have left behind no written record of the spoken word which the Lord sent them forth to bear unto Israel. There is the great prophet of repentance, Elijah—he who contended against the ungodly king, the idolatrous queen, against the priests and prophets of Baal; he who prayed that it might not rain, and it rained not for three years and six months, and he prayed again, and heaven gave rain and the earth yielded her fruit; he who together with Moses met the Savior upon the Mount of Transfiguration—how gladly would we not have had his penitential sermons written down as a testimony for us! There is Elisha, the man of faith, with his unwearied labor for his people; there is John the Baptist, the greatest of those born of women, his voice crying in the wilderness: Prepare ye the way of the Lord! What joy would it not have been to possess a book from their own hand, wherein they themselves had set down what the Spirit had given them to testify unto Israel! But the Lord has willed it otherwise.

There are other Prophets, to whom He granted both to speak and to contend—men to whom He Himself revealed what should come to pass in the latter times, and whom He commanded to write down what was revealed to them, as a hope for the future for God's children under the old Covenant, as admonition and consolation in the faith for us who live in the last days, in the blessed times of fulfillment.

The writing Prophets are all found within a definite period of the history of the people of Israel. And this period is especially that in which Israel more and more hardened its heart against the Word of God, and thus the proclamation of the Prophets did not immediately bear the blessed fruit of repentance in the stiffened people. **Therefore the Prophets were given command to write down the sermon, that the Word which in the days of the Prophets seemed only to bear the fruit of hardening might, in the Lord's good pleasure and appointed hour, also bear a rich fruit of awakening and contrition when it was read anew.** At the same time God also caused, in the Gentile world, the mighty kingdoms of the world to arise as instruments of punishment over the obdurate Israel; and the Prophets foretold both their victories and their fall, as a testimony for the Gentiles in the fullness of time, that it was the Lord who gave His people into their hand, and that it

was not their great strength and proud power which overcame Israel and Israel's God. The omnipotence and mercy of God were to shine forth toward the Gentiles in the prophetic Scriptures, when the Lord, through the Gospel of His Son, caused the rays of grace to shine into the darkness of the Gentile world.

Thus it is that precisely in Israel's darkest hour and in the proudest days of the world-kingsdoms the Lord caused His good Word to be richly written down by the holy Prophets, that His faithfulness and truth might appear all the more gloriously—unto the Jew first and also unto the Greek—when the Sun of Righteousness arose for both upon the morning of Christ's resurrection. Then were the Scriptures to burn within the disciples, when Christ and His Holy Spirit opened the Scriptures unto them.

Also the prophet Jeremiah was to write in a book what the LORD caused him to see. Why he was to do this, the LORD himself has explained in Jeremiah 30:1–3; 30:24; and 36:2–3. It is because the LORD still wills to gather all his judgments and his promises to his people into a book, if so be that they might be willing to hearken unto them. It is because in the latter days he will turn again the captivity of his people Israel and bring them back to the land which he gave unto their fathers; then shall they acknowledge his faithfulness. It is because Israel is now hardened and understands not the good counsel of the LORD and his thoughts of peace toward them; but in the last times, when the LORD has poured out his burning wrath upon his people and upon the proud heathen, when he has fulfilled the thoughts of his heart, then shall they understand it.

We have already seen that the two great matters in Jeremiah's calling are these: that he is set over nations and kingdoms, and that he is appointed first as a prophet of destruction and thereafter as a prophet of restoration. We must therefore expect in his book to find prophecies against Israel and prophecies against the heathen, and that these prophecies must contain, first and foremost, proclamation of judgment and thereafter promise of salvation.

And so it is indeed the case that, just as the prophet's life was governed by the divine calling, so also his book is determined thereby and ordered according to its content. Over Jews and heathen he is set, and his book of prophecy sets forth truer words for them both. Crushing and raising up were to mark his labor, and his book is a mighty juxtaposition of smiting and healing oil and wine poured into deep wounds.

The prophet's book is divided into two principal parts, according to the order: the Jew first and then the heathen. The first principal part consists of the first forty-five chapters and is directed chiefly to Israel. The second principal part is chapters 46–51, where the prophet turns to the heathen; to this chapter 52 is added as an appendix, which once more recounts

the destruction of Jerusalem, a matter so dreadful and so grave in Jeremiah's entire prophecy and life.

The portion of the Book that concerns Israel, chapters 1–45, is, however, so extensive that in this Guide for believing and zealous readers of the Bible we shall yet append a few additional remarks concerning it, which we hope may assist one or another in his labour with the precious Word of God. Alas, only far too few are truly inwardly familiar with their Bible; and even those who by the grace of God have found life and salvation in the Word are only too often accustomed to read the Scriptures as though they were nothing more than a collection of detached verses, having little true connection one with another. All the more important, therefore, is it—by the help of the Spirit of God—to attempt to open up the Scriptures, if perhaps someone might be led ever further in upon the green pastures, and find refreshment by the waters of rest, even from the streams of the river that make glad the city of God.

There are three sections in the portion of the Book that concerns Israel: chapters 1–29, 30–33, and 34–45. The prophet's first calling was to pluck up and to tear down, to destroy and to overthrow by his mighty prophetic word. He was to strike down all the false supports upon which Israel relied; he was to tear away from them everything upon which they built their fleshly security—both their confident trust in election and their priests' vain cry of the temple of the Lord; both the prophets' shouting, "Peace! Peace! and no danger!" and the kings' fleshly confidence in the promise made to David. By the Word he was to seek to bend the heart of the people into brokenness before the Lord, if only they might repent. But if this should not succeed, then he was in his word to declare to them that the people would be uprooted from their land and carried away to their enemies in bondage; that the land would be laid waste until it became a wilderness; that the temple would be torn down and burned with fire; that the king would be cast down from David's throne and have no son to inherit the power. This prophetic demolition by the Word Jeremiah sets before us in the first section of the Book concerning Israel, chapters 1–29, which we may call the Book of Demolition.

In these first twenty-nine chapters there is first related the calling of the Prophet in chapter 1. Thereupon begins the great series of crushing penitential sermons, in which here and there flashes a glimpse of hardening forth between the heavy, dark storm-clouds. Judah is punished in chapter 2, because it has exchanged the LORD for idols, because it has forsaken the fountain of living waters and hewn out for itself broken cisterns that can hold no water. Chapters 3–6 are a mighty sermon against the pride of Judah, which exalted itself above its sister, the kingdom of Israel. Judah has seen Israel's fate and punishment, yet has not repented; therefore its punishment shall be the heavier. Priests and prophets and princes, who have strengthened the people in its sin upon the brink of the abyss, shall be utterly

helpless in the day of visitation, and the whole people shall be called rejected silver; for the LORD has rejected them (6:30).

Then follows in chapters 7–10 the great Temple Sermon, so called from 7:2 and 4. The self-righteous reliance upon the Temple is altogether in vain; and because it only hardens the heart of the people, therefore such judgment shall come upon them that death shall be preferred to life by all the remnant that remains of this evil generation (8:3). Thereupon follows discourse upon discourse, in which Israel is exhorted to repentance and threatened with destruction, now by words, now by symbolic actions. Israel is set on a level with the heathen in punishment, and the Prophet is not permitted to pray for them; and ever harder sounds the judgment, until the Prophet in chapter 19 receives command to go, buy a potter's earthen flask, take it with him down into the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, defiled with idolatry, and there break it in the sight of the people as a sign that thus shall Israel's people also be broken and become utterly useless, like a warped vessel of the potter, because it has hardened its neck.

In chapters 20–24 the overthrow turns itself more toward individual prominent persons. In chapter 20 judgment is pronounced upon Pashhur, who mistreated the Prophet; in chapters 21 and 22 upon the wicked kings; in chapter 23 upon the evil shepherds, and especially the false prophets; yet here also a glorious light breaks forth in the midst of the darkness in the promise of the good Shepherd, David's righteous Branch. In chapter 24 the judgment is directed against those left behind in Jerusalem after the removal of Jehoiakim, the bad figs that cannot be eaten. In chapter 25 the measure of hardening is full; there the seventy-year exile is proclaimed. And in chapter 26 the Prophet shows that the LORD's Temple will not shield Israel from judgment; for it too shall be broken down. Nor can Zedekiah's alliance with the heathen princes stay the judgment (chapters 27 and 28). Finally, those already carried away shall not expect any speedy return from Babylon; therefore the Prophet sends them a letter, that they should with patience be content in the foreign land until the LORD's time comes to bring them back (chapter 29).

This Book of divine judgment is, in chapters 1–24, chiefly a book of penitential preaching, whereas chapters 25–29 are a definite proclamation of a judgment that is unavoidable, and whose time and hour are already revealed, in that at the same time the last grounds of comfort, to which the hardened people clung, are torn away without any sparing.

The prophet's calling had also set him to build and to plant, and in his book there follows upon the heavy discourses of demolition and crushing a most beautiful Book of Consolation. This is the second section of Israel's portion, chapters 30–33. The prophet proclaims a great

time of tribulation over Jacob; yet he shall be saved out of it. It is so painful, that little while, for it is an hour of birth, and the Lord brings forth for himself a people (chap. 30). The people that are born are the tribes of Israel and Judah, whom the Lord gathers; and when he has gathered them, he establishes with them a new covenant, a covenant of forgiveness of sins and of regeneration, so that the old people has passed away, and behold, there is a new people, born of God (chap. 31). A sure sign of this superabounding grace of the Lord the prophet receives in the prison. In the midst of this siege, which ends with the fall of Jerusalem and the devastation of the land, he is commanded to buy a field, as though there were the deepest peace in the land; thereby the Lord will point forward to the great peace that shall be in the land when he gathers the scattered into one people and gives them one heart and one way (chap. 32). The people that are gathered and born shall be a people in joy and blessedness, an innumerable host of singers and priests unto God (chap. 33).

Finally, chapters 34–45 form the third section of Israel's portion. Its purpose and content are to show how the Lord fulfills the words of his servant Jeremiah. Jerusalem fell, the temple was burned, the people were carried away, the land became a wilderness. This section is therefore chiefly narrative, with brief prophetic utterances interwoven into the account. Yet not only is this section the Book of Judgment over the hardened people; it is also the Book of Jeremiah's sufferings. Here we are told in great detail how the people, upon whom the Lord's punishment fell, in their bitterness turned against the Lord's messenger and mistreated him in many ways, so that he truly became a foreshadowing of the suffering Savior, who suffered, the righteous for the unrighteous. Thus these chapters are placed here to show that God is not mocked. His threatenings he fulfills, and even over those who are his prophets and messengers he brings the purifying fire of tribulation, that they may come forth as gold tried in the fire and be unto praise and glory and honor at the coming of Jesus Christ. The faithful prophet had to suffer with his people; but God gathered his tears and his pain and caused them to become a harvest of joy, when his time came to comfort his people, to give it double from his hand for all its sins, to gather all its scattered ones and to make the children of the desolate more than hers who had a husband. Jeremiah was the one who more than any other prophet in the old covenant went forth with weeping; now the time has come when another crop of the gray-haired fathers is gathered into the barn. May the Lord grant of his grace that we all might be of this new people of God, with one heart and one way! For us all this is written, for us all this struggle is waged; let us therefore diligently consider also this man of sorrows and his day's work in the Lord's vineyard, that we might thereby be strengthened to remain faithful in the suffering that is entrusted to us.