

GOD'S FIRE AND HAMMER NO. 2460

A SERMON
INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, APRIL 12, 1896.
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
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*“Is not My word like as a fire? says the LORD; and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?”
Jeremiah 23:29.*

As we noticed while reading the chapter, there were a great many pretenders in the times of Jeremiah, so that when the true prophet of God came forth and declared, “Thus says the Lord,” he was met by false prophets who contradicted him, and said something the very opposite of what he had to say, and yet prefaced their utterance with the same declaration, “Thus says the Lord.” This, of course, tended very much to harden the hearts of the people against the divine message, and it also grievously embarrassed Jeremiah. He hardly knew how to meet it—it seemed to checkmate him.

This evil also greatly grieved the Lord, for it was not according to His mind that these men should pretend to speak under His inspiration and to speak as if they felt the burden of the Lord, when He had never sent them, and they had not delivered His message. He therefore gave a test by which the true could be distinguished from the false. In the verse before our text, the Lord asks, “What is the chaff to the wheat?” That which these false prophets said was but chaff compared with the divine message delivered by Jeremiah, which was as wheat—so the Lord puts the matter thus, “You hear these men speak, and you are interested and pleased, and you say to yourselves, ‘This is fine oratory, this man has a grand way of speaking.’ You admire his style, his eloquence, his depth of thought, and all that, but I say to you, ‘Is not My word like as a fire?’ It comes not as a thing of beauty, but with force, with energy. It comes to you, not that you may stand, and look at it, but it has within itself a burning and consuming force. And by this shall My word be known from the word of man—that it has a mystic power about it which cannot be found in the words of men. And it is a breaking force, as when a mighty hammer strikes the rock, and strikes it again and again till even the solid granite is compelled to yield.” The false prophets had no such force in their words. They did not pretend to have any fire in what they said. They spoke very pleasingly, and very flatteringly—they made the people vain—they told them, in effect, that nothing would happen, but what would delight them! They might go on in their sins, but it would be all right. They might indulge the blindest hopes that everything in the future would be according to their own wishes. That was man’s word, but when the Lord spoke by His servant, Jeremiah, His word was “like as a fire.” There was something burning about it—human nature did not like it—but human nature was made to feel its force and power! When the false prophets spoke, they would bow and cringe to the people, and say all manner of soft and pleasing things. But when Jeremiah spoke, in the name of Jehovah, every word seemed to tell upon his hearers! It was as when a mighty man lifts up a sledgehammer, and brings it down with all his force upon the stone he means to break. The message did not comfort the ungodly, but it broke their hearts, for the prophet was seeking, if possible, to separate them from their sins.

We will begin with the statement which is made so plainly here, *the Word of God has power in it*. It is like fire. It is like a hammer. It is like fire and hammer combined, and it operates upon men’s hearts much in the way in which the fire and hammer of the smith operate upon the iron, fashioning and shaping it according to his design. When I have spoken upon this point, I will seek, first, to *illustrate this statement*, and then to *put it to a practical test*.

I. First then, THE WORD OF GOD HAS POWER IN IT.

And first, the Lord Himself says *it is like a fire*. I am now speaking of God’s Word. Not, mark you, God’s Word as it is declared by certain men. Not as it may come to you garnished with force of eloquence, beauty of poetry, animation of expression, and the like—but the Word of God *itself*—the truths of God which are revealed in this wonderful Book, the truths which the Holy Spirit has been pleased to make known to the sons of men. These are “like as a fire.” You who are the people of God must often have felt greatly comforted, encouraged, and cheered when you have been hearing the gospel, just as

when, on a cold day, and you are half numbed with cold, if your eyes are blindfolded, you know when you are coming near a fire by the genial glow which you feel. You delight yourself in the Word of the Lord as you warm your hands at a bright cheery fire! Is it not so when God's Word is preached? Men may laugh at us, and say that we have a very sweet tooth for certain doctrines, but even dogs know when they are well fed. "The ox knows his owner, and the ass his master's crib"—and we are not so foolish that we do not know what truth it is that cheers and comforts our heart, and what kind of teaching it is that makes us glad in the midst of the winter of our discontent. There is far too much teaching, nowadays, that will not comfort a mouse! You might hear it to all eternity, and never be relieved of a single ounce of the burden of life. You might come in and out of the house of God, and you might, perhaps, say, "Yes, it is very pretty," but what is *that* to a man who has the burden of life to carry, and the battle of life to fight? But when you hear the glorious gospel of the blessed God, it lifts you up out of your discouragements, and makes you say, after all, "It is worthwhile to live; it is worthwhile to suffer; it is worthwhile to press forward, for we see the great love the Lord has toward us, and what good things He has laid up in store for them that love Him." The Word of the Lord is like a fire, for it warms and comforts the hearts of His people. There is such a thing as unction—I cannot tell you what it is, but I can tell you when I hear a sermon from a man who has it—and I can tell you when I hear a sermon that is without it. And I know that if it is God's Word, there is a savor, an unction, a sweetness, a delightfulness about it that makes our very hearts leap and dance within us because of the blessed and glorious sound of the gospel of God! Happy are the people that know this joyful sound!

But next, fire is only at work very moderately when it yields us comfort. It has also the effect of paining and awakening. You put your finger in the fire, and you will know that it burns! You lay your hand upon a red-hot bar of iron, and you will not need anybody to tell you that there is fire within it! So, even if you are an unconverted man—if you have, as yet, no knowledge of the power of the gospel of God—yet if you come in contact with it, I will guarantee you that you will know it! Very likely you will show that you know it by getting very angry, growing very indignant. Men do not like being singed and scorched by the gospel! When a fellow has burnt his hand, he does not feel pleased with the hot iron—and the gospel often operates upon men most beneficially when it excites their wrath. I have not much hope of the sinner who keeps on hearing the truth of God, and saying, "Yes, I like that kind of preaching. I quite enjoy our minister's sermons." I have a great deal more hope of a man when he says, "I will never hear *that* fellow again, I cannot bear to listen to him," and goes out in a rage! He will come back before long—the hook is in his jaw—he is feeling the sharpness of it, and he will not be able to get away from it.

The Word of the Lord is as a fire, and if a man touches fire, it will burn him, and he will be made to know that he has come into contact with it. Have you not, dear friends, felt it to be so? If you have sat for years under a ministry, and have remained not only unconverted, but unmoved—if you have always felt perfectly pleased and satisfied with yourself, and with what you have heard—I should think it cannot have been the gospel of Jesus Christ! If it has been the true gospel of the grace of God, I am sure that it will either make you angry with yourself, or angry with your sin, or angry with *itself*, for, if you do not hate your sin, you will hate the gospel with all its lovingness! God's Word is so stern a witness against everything that is evil, that it is like fire, in that it pains, startles, and awakens. Men cannot go to sleep when their fingers are on fire—neither can they when the true gospel is sounding aloud in their ears!

Fire also has a melting power, and so has the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Oh, dear friends, there are some of us who once had hearts of steel—nothing seemed able to move us, and melt us, but we came under the influence of the blessed Spirit of God, and under the sound of the gospel—and soon we began to feel, we began to tremble, we began to be in distress, we began to lament, we began to seek the Savior, we began to trust Him! All things were changed under the influence of this divine fire. Oh, that we could get the hearts of many hardened ones into the very center of the blessed flame till the holy heat should make them flow like melted wax before the presence of the God of Israel! Certainly the gospel has a wonderful power to melt the heart of man.

More than that, the gospel has a consuming power. When it first comes into a district, it finds people indifferent to it, but possibly it begins by burning up some one of their vices. It may be that drunks are reformed. Then, straightway, the men who get gain out of this evil merchandise are sure to be indignant about it! They see the demon of drunkenness cast out of men, and they cry, "Our gains are gone!" And they are angry, but they cannot stop the fire. Once fairly set alight, it will burn, blaze, and spread till others shall cast away their evil habits, and turn unto the living God!

I cannot help noticing in history the consuming power of the gospel of Christ. There have been old systems of iniquity that have been hoary with age, but when, at last, they have been attacked by the Church of God with the sword of the Spirit, and the gospel of Christ, they have been utterly destroyed! There was, for instance, that abominable institution of slavery—and there was a part of the Church of Christ which tried to palliate it, and spoke of it as “a divine institution, a peculiar institution,” and I know not what! But when the Church of God denounced slavery as a thing utterly inconsistent with Christianity, the thing was burnt up right speedily, and passed away! There are many more social and political wrongs that will have to perish through the burning power of the gospel—and there is much in our *hearts*, and much in our *lives*, and much all round about us that will have to go as the gospel fire burns more and more vigorously! But remember that it must be God's Word that will burn out the evil. We cannot do much with our poor thinking and tinkering—it is the eternal truth of God, the everlasting verities brought to bear upon the sons of men that shall soon separate between the dross and the gold, consuming the one, and leaving the other pure!

But our text also says that *God's Word is like a hammer*—“and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces.” So that, whenever a minister has the gospel to use, this simile should teach him how he ought to use it—with all his might, let him strike with it mighty blows for his Lord! I should think that it does not require any great education to learn how to use a hammer. I do not know, it may, but it seems that to use a hammer aright, one has nothing to do but to strike with it. A stone-breaker, for instance, gets a good strong hammer, and a heap of stones to strike at—and he has but to hit them as hard as he can, and to keep on hitting till all are broken. Brothers, when you preach, take the gospel hammer, and strike as hard as you can with it! “Oh, but I must try to improve the look of my hammer! It must have a mahogany handle!” Never mind about the mahogany handle! Use your hammer for striking—hammers are not for ornament—they are meant to be used for real hard work! And when you come to use the gospel as it ought to be used, the result is wonderful! It is a rock-breaking thing. “Oh,” you cry, “there is a very obdurate man there!” Strike at him with the gospel! “Oh, but he ridicules, and scoffs at the truth of God!” Never mind if he does—keep on smiting him with the gospel. “Oh, but, in a certain district, I have wielded this hammer against the rock for years, and nothing has come of it!” Still go on wielding it, for this is a hammer that never failed! Only continue to use it! Everything is not accomplished with one stroke, nor, perhaps, with 20 strokes. The rock that does not yield the first time, nor the second time, nor the third time, nor the 20th time will yield at last! There is a process of disintegration taking place at every stroke—the great mass is inwardly moving even when you cannot see that it is doing so. And there will come, at last, one blow of the hammer which will seem to do the deed. But all the previous strokes contributed to it, and brought the rock into the right state for breaking it up at last. Hammer away, then, brothers—hammer away with nothing but the gospel of Jesus Christ! The heart that is struck may not yield even year after year, but it will yield at last!

I trust that I am speaking the truth about some of my hearers who have been listening to me for a long time. I have hammered at you with all my might—I do not see that I have done much, yet, but I *do* know that this hammer does not go to be beaten, and as long as you live, and I live, it will do the same work! In the name of the everlasting God, the gospel shall still be brought to bear upon your heart and conscience! O God, grant that we may not be disappointed at the result of our labors, but may the hard hearts yield, after all, to the blows of the gospel hammer!

If any of you are in the habit of hearing sermons which are very fine, very elegant, very logical, very proper, yet if they never strike you as the hammer strikes the rock—if they never aim at breaking your hearts—do not waste any more Sundays in hearing them, for they are not God's Word! This Word is a hammering Word, and if the preacher's message does not strike you—if it does not ultimately break you in pieces—it is because it is not the Word of God to which you have been listening! This is the test which God, Himself, gives to distinguish the true from the false, “Is not My Word like as a fire, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?”

Now put the two together—*the fire and the hammer*—and you will see how God makes His servants who are to be instruments for His use. He puts us into the fire of the Word! He melts, He softens, He subdues! Then He takes us out of the fire, and welds us with hammer strokes such as only He can give, till He has made us fit instruments for His use! And He goes forth to His sacred work of conquering the multitudes, having in His hands the polished shafts that He has forged with the fire and the hammer of His Word!

So far I have dealt with the statement of our text that the Word of God has power in it like as a fire, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces.

II. Now I want, in the second place, to ILLUSTRATE THIS STATEMENT by noticing certain parts of God's Word which have, to our personal knowledge, operated both as a fire and a hammer upon the hearts of men.

A large part of God's Word is taken up with the revelation of His law, and you cannot fully preach the gospel if you do not proclaim the law of the Lord. Men will never receive the balm of the gospel unless they know something of the wounds that sin has made. If the law of God is faithfully and fully preached, what a fire it is! What a hammer it is! That law which takes cognizance of our words, and our thoughts; that law which we are constantly breaking by sins of omission, and sins of commission; that law which declares that God will by no means clear the guilty, that law which must be followed by punishment upon those who disobey it—for the Lord our God is a jealous God, and He will not have His law trampled upon—that law is both a fire and a hammer! When once the Spirit of God blesses the solemn declarations about the law of God so as to bring them home to the conscience, what a hammer it is! What a fire it is!

I shall never forget the time when I felt that fire so that I could not rest day or night, and when I felt that hammer till I seemed broken in pieces with its tremendous blows! That law which will justify no man till he keeps it perfectly. That law which condemns every man who has violated it but once. That law which demands death as the penalty for each offense. That law which casts man into prison, out of which he can never come till he has paid the uttermost farthing—that law is, indeed, a fire and a hammer, and many have been burned and broken by it! Remember how John Bunyan felt its force for years? Many of us for briefer times have, nevertheless, realized that there is no teaching in the world that is so terrible as the proclamation of God's law—nothing that so breaks the heart in pieces as a true revelation of the just demands of the Most High God.

But, beloved brothers, have you not also felt that there is fire-work and hammer-work *in the teaching of the gospel*? Oh, how often have we seen men who have not been moved, even by the law of God, at last won to Christ by the preaching of the gospel—the gospel of free grace and dying love, full forgiveness for the greatest sinners—immediate, irreversible pardon given in a moment to every sinner who believes in Christ! Oh, how this gospel has acted like a fire, and burned up all the sinner's opposition! How this gospel has also been like a hammer to break down human obstinacy! The gospel of redemption through the precious blood of Jesus; the gospel which tells of full atonement made; the gospel which proclaims that the utmost farthing of the ransom price has been paid, and that, therefore, whoever believes in Jesus is free from the law, free from guilt, and free from hell—the proclaiming of this gospel has made men's hearts burn within them, and has dashed out the very brains of sin, and made men joyfully flee to Christ! So, preach the gospel, then—the gospel of justification by faith, the gospel of regeneration by the Holy Spirit, the gospel of final perseverance through the unchanging love of God. Preach the whole of the glorious gospel of the blessed God as it is revealed in the covenant of grace, and you will be doing fire-and-hammer work of the very choicest sort!

Above all, brothers, what fire-and-hammer power there is *in the doctrine of the cross*! The ever-blessed Christ of God has the sins of all His people laid upon Him, and He is fastened to the cross of shame. He whom angels worshipped is hanged up as a felon! He bleeds and dies for guilty men. When every other piece of artillery has failed to break open the gates of the city of Mansoul, the battering ram of the cross has made every timber start. Man must yield when the power of the Spirit of God applies to his heart the doctrine of the precious blood! The old, old story of the cross has more power in it to melt the heart of man than all the other stories that were ever told! You must often have felt it to be so, you who are servants of God! Have you not often been melted and broken down by the story of the cross? Yes, and you are not ashamed to be so broken down—rather do you strike upon your breasts with indignation that your hearts should be so hard to break—and your wish is that you may always be deeply sensitive to that sacred tragedy, that divine story of Him who was “found guilty of excess of love,” but guilty of nothing beside. Yes, brothers and sisters, one might go on to illustrate the truth of this statement, that everywhere God's Word has power as a hammer, and as a fire, but especially those parts of it which speak of the law, the gospel, and the cross!

III. Time fails me, so I must close my discourse by asking you to PUT THE STATEMENT OF THE TEXT TO A PRACTICAL TEST—“Is not My Word like as a fire, says the Lord; and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?”

Let us, first, *try it upon ourselves*. You are very sad, are you? Your heart is cold. Now, brother, sister, read a chapter from the Word. Open the Bible. Sit down and study it. Ask God to bless it to you, and I am sure you will soon be delighted to find that it is like a fire to warm and comfort you. When you are

sad, do not run into your neighbor's house, do not sit down, alone, and weep in sullen despair—get to the Word of the Lord! There is such sweetness in it, there is such power in it that in a short time you shall have beauty instead of ashes, and songs instead of sighs.

You say that you are not sad, but you are very sleepy. You have become very drowsy and dull in the ways of God. You have not the earnest spirit you used to have, nor half the spiritual life and vigor you once felt. Very well, then come to God's Word—read it, study it, listen to it, find out where that Word is faithfully preached, and go there! Oh, how quickly the Lord has blessed some of us in times of great barrenness! A single sentence has brought us out of our lethargy into holy energy. One chapter of that Word has operated upon us more swiftly than a charm. "Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Amminadib." Cling to the gospel, whatever the state into which your heart gets—if you would again enjoy your first love, remember where you received it—it was in the hearing of the Word! Therefore go and hear it again, and search the Scriptures for yourself, that you may be revived and restored.

Perhaps another friend says, "I have lost so much of my comfort, assurance, and joy, that I feel as if I had grown quite cold, and hard, and insensible." Why need you be cold when God's Word is like a fire? Why need your heart remain like a rock when God's Word is like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces? Get back to the gospel, dear friend—that is the cure for your hardness and coldness! I saw, the other day, a man whom I used to know as a very energetic Christian. He went away from us, and joined another church where the pastor is an eloquent man, and he has been there for years. I said to him, "Well, how are you getting on?" He answered, "Oh, I hardly know! I always like to hear the minister preach." "But how does your soul prosper?" I inquired. "Ah," he replied, "you have puzzled me, now, for ever since I have been there, I have not dared to think whether I have a soul or not! The fact is, that kind of preaching does not do for people who have souls." "Oh, dear, me!" I said to him, "if I were you, I would flee from the place! If the preaching does not feed your soul, and make you grow in love to God, and in likeness to Christ, what is the good of it?" We must feel the power of the Word upon our hearts if we would be strong and active in service for our Lord! But it is according to the nature of God's Word that he who feeds thereon should be changed into its nature. As the Word of the Lord is quick and powerful, if you feed on it, it shall make you live, and it shall fill you with true power—it shall sanctify and purify you, and make you to reflect the character of God.

And next, brothers and sisters—still using our text practically—as God's Word is like a fire, and like a hammer, if we have used it upon ourselves, *let us try to use it upon others*. I have an opinion that there are a great many persons in this world whom we give up as hopeless, who have never really been tried and tested with the gospel in all their lives. I am afraid that there are in this place persons of whom we speak as unlikely to be converted, who have never been fully brought under the influence of the fire of God's Word, or beneath the fall of the hammer of the gospel. "I brought one person," says somebody. I am glad you have, my dear friend, but have you ever spoken faithfully to that person about his soul? "Well, I do not know that I have. I have said a *little* to him." Have you ever plainly put the gospel before him? "Well, I do not think he was quite the person to be spoken to in that fashion." Ah, I see that you thought you were going to burn him without using fire, and to break that rock without lifting the hammer! The fact is, you believed that something better than the gospel fire was needed in his case, or that something gentler than the gospel hammer was needed. Will you not try that old-fashioned hammer upon him? Will you not try that old fire upon him? I have heard of congregations where men have said, "There is no good to be done there." And I have wondered if they were to try preaching one of the old-fashioned sort of gospel sermons—if they could get Mr. Whitefield to preach, or have someone to preach the same truth as Whitefield preached—what results would follow? When people say that the hearts of the people are not affected by the preaching in any place, I ask, "But was it the *gospel* with which you tried to affect them? Was it the very Word of God that was preached?" *Our* words are like paper pellets thrown against the wall—they effect nothing! But God's Word is like a shot fired from one of the greatest Woolwich cannons! When it comes, it crashes through every obstacle, and destroys everything that is opposed to it.

Why should we not always set the whole truth of God before those whom we seek to save? I believe that sometimes, even in Sunday schools, children are taught "to love gentle Jesus," and so on, as if *that* were the way of salvation. Why not tell them to *believe* in the Lord Jesus Christ? Why is love to take the place of *faith*? Let it be the same gospel for the children that you give to the adults! Try them with the same gospel, and see what will come of it—and let this work be attempted everywhere.

"But," says someone, "there are certain districts where you cannot do any good if you try to preach the gospel. You must fiddle to the people, and drum to them—and then you must have amusements and

entertainments for them, you must have penny readings and concerts." Very well, convert sinners that way if you can, dear friends—I do not object to any method that results in the winning of souls! Stand on your head if that will save the people, but still, it seems to me that if God's Word is like a fire, there is *nothing* like it for burning its way! And if God's Word is like a hammer, there can be *nothing* like that Word for hammering down everything that stands in the way of Jesus Christ! Why, then, should we not continually try the gospel and nothing but the gospel?

"Well," says one, "but the poor people are dirty—we must have various sanitary improvements." Of course we must! Go on with them as fast as you can—the more of such things, the better! There is nothing like soapsuds and whitewash for dirty people, and dirty places, but you may whitewash and soap them as long as you like, yet *that* will not save their souls without the gospel of Christ! You may go to them, and plead the cause of temperance with them, and I hope you will—the more of it, the better. Make teetotalers of every one of them if you can, for it will be a great blessing to them! But still, you have not really done anything permanent if you stop there. Try the gospel! Try the gospel! Try the gospel! When the gospel was tried against the world in the days of Paul—when the power of the great empire of Rome had crushed out liberty, and when lust of the most abominable kind made the world reek in the nostrils of God—nothing was done but preaching Jesus Christ, and Him crucified! And the common people heard of Jesus Christ, heard of Him gladly, and believed in Him! And very soon, down went the false gods, down went the brutal lusts of the Roman Empire, and a great part of the world was permeated with the gospel! And it *needs* to be done again, and it *must* be done again! But remember that it is only to be done by that same Word of the Lord which did it the first time. And the sooner we get back to that Word, the better. And the more we throw away everything else but the simple proclaiming of that Word, the speedier will be the victory, and the swifter and sure will be the triumph for our God, and for His Christ!

O Sirs, if you want to have your hearts renewed, it is the gospel that must melt them! If you want to be saved, it is the gospel that must save you! "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." This is the substance of the revelation from heaven—accept it, and God bless you, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:

JEREMIAH 23:1-32.

Verse 1. *Woe be unto the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture! says the LORD.*

What a dreadful woe this is upon all false shepherds—those who profess to be sent of God to instruct the people, but who are not sent of God at all, whose labors only result in the scattering of the sheep, and destroying them instead of gathering them to Christ for their salvation!

2-4. *Therefore thus says the LORD God of Israel against the pastors that feed My people: You have scattered my flock, and driven them away, also have not visited them; behold, I will visit upon you the evil of your doings, says the LORD. And I will gather the remnant of My flock out of all countries where I have driven them, and will bring them again to their folds, and they shall be fruitful and increase. And I will set up shepherds over them who shall feed them: and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall they be lacking, says the LORD.*

If the under-shepherds do not feed the flock, God, Himself, will do it, for His own redeemed flock shall not be torn of wolves, nor left to perish in the lands where they are driven. That Great Shepherd of the sheep will do what others fail to do, but this does not take away from them their responsibility, and it must be the most solemn responsibility that rests on mortal man to profess to be a shepherd of souls, yet not to be sent of God.

6. *Behold, the days come, says the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth.*

We are looking for that glorious King! Oh, that He would soon come! He is the great Monarch who shall absorb all other monarchies, for, "He shall reign forever and ever."

6. *In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is His name whereby He shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.*

What a glorious name for our King who is made of God unto us "righteousness." We may well rejoice to think that all the perfect righteousness of our great King and Lord shall belong to us, for this shall be His very name, "THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS."

7, 8. *Therefore, behold, the days come, says the LORD, that they shall no more say, The LORD lives, which brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; but, the LORD lives which brought up*

and which led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north country, and from all countries where I had driven them; and they shall dwell in their own land.

There are better times for Israel than Israel has ever known as yet! The glories of Egypt and of the Red Sea are yet to be eclipsed. And there are better times in store for the Church of God than she has seen as yet!

9. *My heart within me is broken because of the prophets.*

In Jeremiah's day there was a set of men who pretended to be prophets, yet who contradicted the Lord's servant at every point.

9. *All my bones shake; I am like a drunken man, and like a man whom wine has overcome, because of the LORD, and because of the words of His holiness.*

Jeremiah had really received the Word of the Lord, and it seemed to overpower him—as that Word was full of terror, he felt like one who was overcome with wine.

10, 11. *For the land is full of adulterers, for because of swearing the land mourns; the pleasant places of the wilderness are dried up, and their course is evil, and their force is not right. For both prophet and priest are profane; yes, in My house have I found their wickedness, says the LORD.*

It is an awful thing when wickedness abounds even in the house of God, and it is to be feared that, in many places, the Church of the present day is not clear in this matter.

12. *Therefore their way shall be unto them as slippery ways in the darkness.* What an awful description of the doom of the profane prophets and priests! Slippery ways are bad enough in the light, but, "their way shall be unto them as slippery ways in the darkness."

12-14. *They shall be driven on, and fall therein: for I will bring evil upon them, even the year of their visitation, says the LORD. And I have seen folly in the prophets of Samaria; they prophesied in Baal, and caused My people Israel to err. I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem an horrible thing.*

It was bad enough for Samaria to go astray. There was a mixed race there, so it was no wonder that their prophets were foolish, but oh, that in Jerusalem, the city of the great King, there should be false prophets—that was worst of all! This was the style of these prophets—

14, 15. *They commit adultery, and walk in lies: they strengthen also the hands of evildoers, that none returns from his wickedness: they are all of them unto Me as Sodom, and the inhabitants thereof as Gomorrah. Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts concerning the prophets, Behold, I will feed them with wormwood, and make them drink the water of gall: for from the prophets of Jerusalem is profaneness gone forth into all the land.*

When preachers are bad, who wonders that people are worse? If the prophets go astray, how shall those who follow them find the right road?

16. *Thus says the LORD of hosts, hearken not unto the words of the prophets that prophesy unto you: they make you vain.*

That is one mark of a false prophet—he makes you feel that you are a fine fellow, that there is something good in you—"They make you vain."

16. *They speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the LORD.*

That is another of the marks of a false prophet. Such a man as that is a great thinker—he has thought out his theology, himself, he has imagined and invented it, himself—"They speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the Lord."

17. *They still say unto them that despise Me, The LORD has said you shall have peace; and they say unto everyone that walks after the imagination of his own heart, No evil shall come upon you.*

This is yet another mark of the false prophet. He always tries to smooth down the consequences of sin. "In the future state," he says, "sin may occasion some temporary inconvenience, but all things will come right, sooner or later." That is a man sent of the devil! He is no servant of the living God! By these three tests you may prove who are the false prophets—they make you vain, they speak out of their own heart, not out of the mouth of God, and they try to make it easy for you to sin by denying the greatness of the penalty attached to it.

18, 19. *For who has stood in the counsel of the LORD, and has perceived and heard His word? Who has marked His word, and heard it? Behold, a whirlwind of the LORD is gone forth in fury, even a grievous whirlwind: it shall fall grievously upon the head of the wicked.*

This is God's Word—He does not prophesy smooth things to the wicked! He does not promise slight consequences of sin, but "a whirlwind" and, "a grievous whirlwind."

20-22. *The anger of the LORD shall not return, until He has executed, and till He has performed the thoughts of His heart: in the latter days you shall consider it perfectly. I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied. But if they had stood in My counsel, and had caused My people to hear My words, then they should have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings.*

False prophets are futile and vain—no good result comes of all their teaching. But oh, if they had known the Word of the Lord! If they had really been sent of God, what a difference there would have been! God grant that none of us may pretend to teach others what we have never learned, or to speak for God if God has never spoken to us!

23-26. *Am I a God at hand, says the LORD, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? says the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? says the LORD. I have heard what the prophets said, that prophesy lies in My name, saying, I have dreamed, I have dreamed. How long shall this be in the heart of the prophets that prophecy lies? Yes, they are prophets of the deceit of their own heart.*

They profess to be prophets of their own heart, but “they are prophets of the *deceit* of their own heart,” for that which comes out of man’s heart is like the heart, itself, and man’s heart “is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.”

27, 28. *Which think to cause My people to forget My name by their dreams which they tell every man to his neighbor, as their fathers have forgotten My name for Baal. The prophet that has a dream, let him tell a dream.*

Let him tell it as a dream, for it is nothing more than that! If he has dreamt it, let him say, “This is a dream that I have dreamed, but it is only a dream.”

28. *And he that has My Word, let him speak My Word faithfully.*

Let him speak it as the Word of the Lord.

28. *What is the chaff to the wheat? says the LORD.*

Man’s thoughts, man’s conceptions, at their very best, are but as chaff—only the Word of the Lord is the true wheat.

29, 30. *Is not My Word like as a fire? says the LORD; and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces? Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets, says the LORD, that steal My Words every one from his neighbor.*

Borrowed sermons—pages of other people’s experience—fragments pulled from old or new divines—nothing of their own, nothing that God ever said to them, nothing that ever thrilled their hearts or swayed their souls—God will not acknowledge such teaching as this!

31. *Behold, I am against the prophets, says the Lord, that use their tongues, and say, He says.*

They have not any hearts—they only use their tongues. They say, “He says,” as if God had said to them something which He has never said.

32. *Behold, I am against them that prophesy false dreams, says the Lord, and tell them, and cause My people to err by their lies, and by their lightness; yet I sent them not, nor commanded them: therefore they shall not profit this people at all, says the LORD.*

See how heavily God deals with the false prophets of Jeremiah’s time? He will deal with equal severity with any who preach or teach anything other than the gospel of His blessed Son—the pure revelation which is written in this Book! God grant that none of us may be deceived by them, for His dear Son’s sake! Amen.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—386, 484, 447.

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