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Veritas House,

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OLD TESTAMENT SERIES No.10
THE GREATER PROPHETS



FATHER FELIX. O.M. CAP. L.S.S.
DUBLIN: CATHOLIC TRUTH SOCIETY OF IRELAND.

Nihil Obstat:
RECCAREDUS FLEMING,
Censor Theol. Deput.

Imprimi Potest:
✠IOANNES CAROLUS,
Archiep. Dublinen.,
Hiberniae Primas.

Dublino, die 13 Julii, anno 1942.

Nihil Obstat:
FR. CANICUS A KILKENNY,
Censor Theol. Deput.

Imprimi Potest:
FR. COLMANUS A DONERAILE,
Minister Provincialis.

Dublino, die 17 Februarii, anno 1943.



THE GREATER PROPHETS

PROPHET

The word *prophet* (in Hebrew—*nabi*) means 'one who speaks for another.' Thus, Aaron is called the prophet of Moses in Exodus 7, 1. In time, however, the word was limited to mean 'one who speaks for *God*.' The prophets, then, are those men and women who received a divine message and gave it to others. The doctrine of a future Messiah was an essential part of the Old Testament creed, and therefore the prophets foresaw and predicted future events concerning Him. But to predict was a secondary part of their mission; they were primarily inspired preachers—defenders of the nation's faith and morals. There were prophets from the beginning of Sacred History; but from the time of Samuel they are more numerous and influential, because of the special dangers which threatened the revealed religion during the Monarchy.

PROPHECY

The gift of prophecy is a miraculous action of God on the mind by which the prophet receives knowledge of religious truths and the mission to communicate without error that knowledge to others. Prophecy was never the result of ordinary religious experience.

Against the polytheism (belief in many gods) of the heathen nations the prophets preached the Unity and Unicity of God—Jahwe is the One and Only God. Against the soulless cults of heathen superstition they preached the Sanctity of God—Jahwe is infinitely true, just and merciful. From the Sanctity of God it was a natural transition to preach morality—the observance of the Law of God, natural and revealed.

There were *false* prophets who pretended to have received divine revelation and the office of speaking for God. These imitated the language and the symbols of the true prophets; but believers had ample means of knowing the true from the false. The true prophet spoke boldly against vice; with no temporal interest; regardless of danger or unpopularity. The false prophets spoke to flatter the powerful; from the

motive of gain; "*her (Jerusalem's) prophets divined for money*" (Micheas 3, 11.) On occasion the true prophets obtained power to work miracles in proof of their divine mission.

The prophets before the eighth century B.C. are called the *non-literary* or the *orator* prophets, because they did not leave any part of their message in writing. Between 800 B.C. and 400 B.C. lived the *literary* prophets whose Books are in the Bible. These are sixteen: the twelve Lesser and the four Greater Prophets. This distinction between Lesser and Greater is not founded on any quality in the prophets or in their message; it is a purely biblical division, based solely on the length of the Books.

The four greater prophets are ISAIAS; JEREMIAS (with the Book of Jeremias are included the Book of his Lamentations and the Book of Baruch); EZECHIEL; DANIEL.

ISAIAS: (734—685 B. C.).

Isaias, the son of Amos, a native of Jerusalem, is the greatest of all the prophets: "*the great prophet, and faithful in the sight of God*" (Ecclesiasticus 48, 25). St. Jerome wrote of him: "He is not so much a prophet as an evangelist . . ." (*) Of his family nothing is said directly; but that he was of noble (perhaps royal) birth is rightly inferred from the high position which he held in the palace. His book shows him to have been a man of culture and education. His style is varied, forceful, sublime, rich in beautiful figures of speech and apt illustrations. (†) His language is the classical Hebrew; the Prophecy of Isaias—prose and poetry—is "the masterpiece of the golden age of Hebrew literature." (‡)

THE VISION OF ISAIAS.

Isaias himself describes the manner of his election to the

*Preface to the translation of Isaias.

†Many of these figures of Isaias have become current in everyday speech; for example: a "league with death" (23, 18); "as a drop of a bucket" (40, 15); "the rock whence you are hewn" (51, 1); "see eye to eye" (52, 8). Read his description of the fall of Babylon beginning: "Hell below was in an uproar to meet thee at thy coming. . . ." (14, 9-27).

‡LES PROPHETES D'ISRAEL. Par Edouard Tobac. Malines, 1921. Volume II, page 10.

arduous office of prophet. It was in the last year of King Ozias (734 B.C.). In an ecstasy he saw God in human appearance, clothed like a king, seated on a raised throne, attended by seraph angels. These angels sang alternately:

Holy, holy, holy is Jahweh of Hosts,

His glory fills the whole earth. (6, 3) ()*

Filled with fear at this revelation of the majesty and holiness of God he lamented his own unworthiness. One of the angels took a burning coal from the altar of incense and with fire purified the lips of Isaias. Then God sent him to preach with the words:

Go and say unto this people:

Hear ye indeed, but heed not,

See ye indeed, but perceive not . . . (6, 9). (†)

The prophet's preaching will only occasion obstinacy in his hearers; His mission will have for result not their conversion, but their greater guilt and punishment.

This was a crushing prospect; but the prophet was not left without hope. For from the remnant of the conquered and humbled nation, as a branch from the trunk of a felled oak or terebinth tree, the Messias and salvation shall come.

This vision of Isaias forms the basis of all his preaching; the revelation received in it gives the key to the understanding of his whole theology. He loves to call God "*the Holy One of Israel*" (1, 4; 10, 20). The purpose of all creatures, especially of man, is to give glory to God. Holiness in man is essential towards this purpose; sin is the opposite of holiness; therefore he inveighs continually against sin of every form. Again, the purpose of the Redemption is to restore holiness to the world; hence he preaches against sin to prepare mankind for the Messias; he longs and prays for the advent of the Messias. Most clearly of all the prophets, Isaias foretold that the Redeemer would be divine and human: triumphant through suffering; beloved of God and rejected by sinners.

THE BOOK OF JUDGMENTS (Chapters 1 to 37).

The Book of Isaias is divided into two very distinct parts. The first part consists of chapters 1 to 37 (36 and 37 are a

*Translation of Rev. Edward J. Kissane, D.D., L.S.S. (THE BOOK OF ISAIAS, Dublin, 1941, Volume 1).

historical epilogue); and it contains sermons preached in Jerusalem between 734 and 700 B.C. (*)

In his early discourses the prophet speaks of the sad spiritual condition of the Chosen People: the worship of the True God has degenerated into an empty ritual—the performance of the external forms of cult with no real love or piety; no care for the laws of justice and charity. He severely blames “*the house of Jacob*” (2, 6)—depository of the Messianic hopes—for the many prevailing vices: idolatry, superstition, blasphemy, pride, avarice, luxury. These crimes will be punished by the ruin of the nation, and salvation will come to a small remnant (2—5).

THE BOOK OF EMMANUEL (Chapters 7 to 12).

The state of religion was bad in the reign of Joatham (734—733 B.C.), who was a weak king, content with half measures; but with the accession of Achaz in 732 B.C. political and religious troubles increased. This apostate king relied for help on pagan Assyria. Isaias rebuked him to his face for his infidelity and unfolded to him the divine plan of salvation. The allied kings of Israel and Syria will not succeed in their plan of destroying the royal line of David because the promise of God is against them. Instead they themselves will be conquered by the king of Assyria; and this will be accomplished before sixty-five years. The same Assyrians to whom Achaz has now allied the Chosen People will yet be the scourge by which God will punish Juda in its turn. Then the victorious Assyrians, drunk with success, will go beyond the divine purpose, and aim to destroy Juda completely. They will fail in this; and their pride will bring about the ruin of their empire.

The two kingdoms of Israel and Juda will rue their pride; their oppression of the poor and widows and orphans. Israel shall be weakened first by the Syrians and the Philistines, then by civil war; and finally the Assyrians shall “*trample them like the mire of the streets*” (10, 6). In the dreadful cycle of God’s vengeance Assyria shall fall in its

*That they are arranged in the order of time is clear from 7, 1; 14, 28; 20, 1; 38, 1. Where exceptions occur (for instance chapter 6 is prior in time to chapter 1) the order of time is deliberately abandoned in favour of a logical order, that is, the grouping together of discourses similar in content. (HISTOIRE DE L’ANCIEN TESTAMENT. Par Monsignor Petit. Volume II, page 218).

own turn. But the fall of Assyria shall be complete; whereas a remnant of Israel and Juda shall be saved (7—12).

THE GENTILE NATIONS

Isaias foretells the downfall of the heathen nations: Babylon; Philistia; Moab; Syria; Ethiopia; Egypt; Edom; Phoenicia (13—23). Then all these predictions of doom (literally—‘burdens’) are summarised in a passage of great descriptive power (24—27)—where with a prophet’s disregard of the perspective of time Isaias merges into one the immediate and the remote futures; the downfall of individual nations and the General Judgment of mankind. For these national cataclysms are stages in the final and full working out of the general law that every power which opposes God shall be broken. But these disasters shall result in the conversion of the gentiles who will have a place in the new kingdom of God. Thus, the purpose of creation, namely, the glory of God, shall be realised—in part by the Church Militant in time; perfectly by the Church Triumphant in eternity.

THE ASSYRIAN INVASION.

Eight sermons of Isaias belong to 702 B.C., the year in which Sennacherib invaded Juda. The prophet insisted on political neutrality; and he urged the king and people to put their confidence in God, Who alone could save them. But his enemies mocked at his message; mimicked and parodied his words in the streets. He threatens divine vengeance on these hypocrites who make a pretence of religion and flout the revealed word of God. When contrary to his repeated warnings envoys went secretly from Jerusalem to negotiate an alliance with Egypt he denounces them as traitors and apostates (28—35).

THE BOOK OF CONSOLATIONS.

The prophecies of the second part of Isaias (38—56) belong to the period of religious decline between 700 and 685 B.C. They were written primarily for the benefit of the future exiles; but they were also intended to sustain the faithful few among the prophet’s contemporaries. The general theme is:

"*Console, console my people, saith your God. . .*" (40, 1). This consolation is twofold: the return of the exiles from Babylon; and the Redemption of the world. The two themes are constantly interwoven, because the return of the exiles is a type or figure of the Redemption: Cyrus, their liberator, is a type of Christ, the Redeemer. The triple division of this second part is outlined in the opening words:

(a) "*Speak ye to the heart of Jerusalem, and call to her: for her evil is come to an end. . .*" (40, 2).

This section speaks of the twofold liberation by Cyrus and by the Messiah (40—48).

(b) "*. . . her iniquity is forgiven. . .*" (40, 2).

The Messiah, "*The Servant of Jahwe,*" is described; He will redeem mankind by His sufferings (49—57).

(c) "*. . . she hath received . . . double for all her sins?*" (40, 2). This is the peroration of the whole Book, and here the sacred orator rises to his greatest heights of eloquence. He advocates true holiness; he speaks of God's kindly Providence; he foretells the rejection of the Jews, and the salvation of a remnant; the call of the gentiles to the true faith. The epilogue tells of the General Judgment; the glory of the elect; the punishment of the reprobate (58—66).

The Book of Isaias was completed in the early turbulent years of King Manasses' reign (from 687 B.C.). An ancient Jewish tradition (accepted by the Fathers of the Church from the time of St. Justin) has it that Isaias, now an old man after fifty years of prophetic ministry, was martyred by order of this king about 685 B.C.; and that he was put to death by being sawn asunder. It is thought too that there is reference to Isaias in the Epistle to the Hebrews 11, 37; . . . *they were cut asunder.*"

In at least eighty-five places of the New Testament Isaias is quoted for his sublime theology and his mastery of expression. St. Paul was a great admirer and a close student of "*the great prophet;*" while in the Gospels the oracles of Isaias, his figures and imagery, are constantly on the lips of Our Divine Lord Himself, to Whose Divinity and Humanity this prophet gave such clear and convincing testimony.

JEREMIAS: (625—583 B.C.)

Jeremias, "the lyric poet of the prophets," is a very

lovable personality; and his prophecy has this special interest that from it much of the life story of its author can be reconstructed.

He was a priest, and therefore of the tribe of Levi; a native of Anathoth in the territory of Benjamin, three miles northeast of Jerusalem. He was called to the prophetic ministry when little more than a boy in the thirteenth year of King Josias of Juda (625 B.C.). Idolatry was widespread; the true religion was neglected; morals were at a low level. Jeremias was of a mild and timorous temperament, and at first he recoiled from the heavy task proposed to him: "*to overthrow, and pluck up, and destroy, and to build again, and renew*" (Ecclesiasticus 49, 9); to denounce their sins to the king and magistrates, priests and people of Juda. But in the vision God touched his lips and gave him courage and eloquence for his mission. These supernatural gifts perfected without changing the impressionable character which was already his by nature; and so his writings are marked by a pathos and tender melancholy entirely his own. Jeremias is a very attractive study too because he is always "the preacher of the love of God."

In the first vision also Jeremias saw (as did Isaias formerly) that his preaching would be fruitless. Under two symbols—a branch of an almond tree (*) and a boiling cauldron—God revealed to him that the ruin of the nation was fast approaching.

THE GATHERING STORM (Chapters 2 to 33).

From the first Jeremias goes to the root cause of the religious, social and political troubles of the time. It is apostasy and idolatry: "*my people have done two evils. They have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and have digged to themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water*" (2, 13). He calls on them to repent of their wicked folly and return to Jahwe. In the general moral corruption special mention is made of deceit, adultery, avarice. He condemns the false prophets who are leading

*Jeremias 1, 11; translated "a rod watching" in our version. The almond-tree is the first to put forth leaves in spring; hence it is a symbol of speedy chastisement here. The boiling cauldron coming from the north is a symbol of the Babylonian invasion.

astray the people; and he foretells the invasion of Juda by the Babylonians.

Jeremias soon experienced the bitter truth of the proverb that "*no prophet is accepted in his own country*" (St. Luke 4, 24). The people of his native Anathoth threatened to put him to death unless he would cease to preach; and his nearest relatives, although to his face they feigned friendship, were secretly working against him. Their persecution wounded deeply the prophet's feelings, He turned to God and poured out his soul in plaintive prayer. Like Job of old he wrestled with the problem of evil: "*Why doth the way of the wicked prosper?*" (12,1).

The false prophets now stirred up trouble for Jeremias. They contradicted his preaching and turned the people against him. God assured him that these false prophets would die "*by the sword and famine*" (14,15), and consoled him with the knowledge that his enemies would yet implore his aid.

When King Josias was slain in the battle in 607 B.C. Jeremias lost a staunch friend; and the cause of religion lost a strong supporter. The false prophets became bolder; the priests joined forces with them; and together they determined to kill Jeremias. Only the intervention of some of the princes and ancients, led by a certain Ahicam and backed by the populace, saved him from death.

It was only in 604 B.C. that Jeremias was inspired to write. He dictated his Book while Baruch, his faithful disciple and secretary, wrote. He sent Baruch to the palace to read the volume to King Joachim and his courtiers. The king became enraged when he heard the threats of the prophet; and he burned the Book. Jeremias and Baruch rewrote the prophecies and added to the first edition. Further additions were made later until the end of the prophet's life.

King Sedecias (596—586 B.C.) was less hostile to Jeremias than Joachim had been; but he was merely a tool in the hands of his courtiers, and the prophet was powerless to sway him aright. In 593 B.C. ambassadors of the kings of Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon came to Jerusalem to secure the support of Sedecias for their league against Babylon. Jeremias bade them announce to their sovereigns that unless they submitted to Nabuchodonosor they would

be defeated and taken prisoners to Babylon. But he was pleading an unpopular cause; and his pleading was in vain. At this time also he sent a letter to the exiles of Juda already in Babylon urging them to settle peaceably there.

The invasion of Juda by Nabuchodonosor threw Sedecias into panic, and he sent to Jeremias to inquire what would be the outcome. Jeremias replied that Jerusalem would fall before the army of Babylon. Then he went in person to the king and offered him a last opportunity of repenting of his crimes: avarice, injustice, judicial murders. He put clearly to the king the alternatives—reform or the destruction of Jerusalem. It was all to no effect; and from now the prophet speaks of "*a remnant*" (23, 3) that shall return to re-establish the Messianic nation.

The final catastrophe loomed nearer and nearer; and when the siege of Jerusalem began in 587 B.C. Jeremias was in prison by order of Sedecias. Baruch, however, was in attendance on him. At this time he received the consoling revelations of the greatest chapters of his Book (30—33).

THE FALL OF JERUSALEM.

Jeremias was released from prison; but when he wished to go to his native Anathoth he was re-arrested at the city gates, on the pretence that he was deserting to the enemy. Scourged, and put in a deep, muddy dungeon he would have died of hunger had not Sedecias intervened. He tried to persuade the king to surrender to the besiegers; but Sedecias was afraid of falling into the hands of those of his own subjects who had deserted to the Babylonians.

After resisting for eighteen months Jerusalem fell in 586 B.C.; and all who had survived the seige and the massacre were led to Rama—eight miles to the north of the city, the headquarters of the Babylonian army. There the prisoners were sorted out—those suitable for colonists to be brought to Babylon; the weak, the aged, the helpless to be left behind. Jeremias was treated kindly by the conqueror, and permitted to remain in Juda. Godolias, son of Ahicam, was appointed governor of Juda; and Jeremias went to Maspath with him. After seven months a conspiracy of fanatics murdered Godolias, his lieutenants, and the Babylonian guards. Then fearing reprisals a large number of the people of Juda fled to Taphnis, near Pelusium in Egypt—

bringing with them by force Jeremias and Baruch. These fugitives founded several colonies in Egypt; and thus began the Jewish *diaspora* or dispersion (34—52).

LAMENTATIONS

The siege of Jerusalem ended, Jeremias sang the dirge of the desolate city in his LAMENTATIONS. No other elegiast has given such perfect expression to human grief as has Jeremias in these inspired threnodies: *How solitary doth the city sit that was full of people . . .* (Lamentations 1, 1). His picture of the siege is heart-rending: he recalls the famine and thirst of the besieged "*when the children and the sucklings fainted away in the streets of the city . . . when they breathed out their souls in the bosoms of their mothers*" (2, 11—12); mothers eating their own children in the madness of hunger (2, 20). Then the insolent triumph of the enemy when the city capitulated; the cruelty and the carnage; the indiscriminate slaughter of ancients and nobles, women and children alike—and that even in the very Sanctuary of God; the plunder and rape; the charred ruins of the temple; the streets of the city flowing with human blood—its walls and towers razed; and the last sad scene—the poor captives manacled and "*dragged by the necks . . . weary and no rest given . . . the young men put to grind naked at the mill, children falling under burdens of wood*" (5, 5 . . . 13).

BARUCH.

In Egypt Jeremias continued his ministry with little result. The majority of the Jewish immigrants abandoned the true religion; they worshipped the moon-god; they stubbornly refused to repent: *As for the word which thou hast spoken to us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken to thee.* . . . (44, 16). In these circumstances it is natural that the prophet's thoughts should have turned to the exiles in Babylon by whom the Messianic nation would be restored. Accordingly in 583 B.C. he sent Baruch to console and instruct them. Baruch was well received by King Joachin (Jechonias) and the priests and people; and his preaching was effective: *they wept, and fasted, and prayed before the Lord* (Baruch 1, 5). Baruch then wrote his short Book which everywhere exhales the spirit of his be-

loved master. It exhorts the exiles to repentance, and promises them a glorious release. The last (sixth) chapter is an epistle of Jeremias written just prior to the deportation of 586 B.C., warning those who were being taken to Babylon against the temptations to idolatry which they would encounter in the land of their exile.

Unhappily the last years and death of Jeremias are shrouded in obscurity. One tradition (favoured by St. Jerome) has it that he and Baruch were martyred at Taphnis—stoned to death by their own countrymen who were annoyed at the preaching of Jeremias. According to another tradition, however, Jeremias was brought to Babylon when Nabuchodonosor conquered Egypt about 568 B.C.; there he was honourably treated and died at a very great age.

EZECHIEL (593-571 B.C.)

Ezekiel, (*) a priest, was an exile "*by the river Chobar*" (1, 1)—that is, near the canal Khabour of the Euphrates; the modern Tell-Abib. His prophecy shows him to have been a grave, austere preacher; inflexibly devoted to his duty as a "*a sentinel to the house of Israel*" (33, 7). He makes frequent use of parables, allegories and symbols. He was favoured with many supernatural visions which he describes minutely—often in the language of realism.

In the fifth year of his exile (593 B.C.) Ezekiel had the vision in which he was called to the prophetic office. A whirlwind brought from the north a large bright cloud. In this cloud the prophet could distinguish four living creatures which he calls "*cherubim*" (10, 10); they had the face and hands of a man, the body of a lion, the feet of a bull, the wings of an eagle. Beside each of them was a wheel and another wheel within it which moved with the cherubim. † Above the cherubim and carried by them God was enthroned; He appeared in dazzling splendour, surrounded by fire and light.

*Pronounced: Ez-ee-key-el

†The imagery of this vision (for long obscure) has been clarified by the discovery in the ruins of Ninive of winged bulls with human faces, called in Assyriac *kirubi*; and of concentric wheels. God appeared to Ezekiel under the imagery used in Babylonian religious art. In Ezekiel these figures symbolise angels—spiritual beings, having perfect intelligence, power, strength and speed. These symbols of Ezekiel are employed also in Apocalypse 4, 7; whence they have been adopted into Christian art to represent the four Evangelists. (LA BIBLE ET LES DECOUVERTES MODERNES. Vol. IV, pages 324-369).

God gave to the prophet a rolled parchment on both sides of which were written "*lamentations, and elegies, and woes*" (2,9); and He commanded Ezechiel to eat the book. In the prophet's mouth this book of woes tasted sweet as honey. This signified that God was avenging the breaking of His covenant by the people of Juda; that the prophet must first assimilate the oracles of God so as to preach them with conviction; and that a sweet reward awaits him who performs a hard duty for conscience' sake. Ezechiel was sent to recall sinners to virtue, and to warn the just against sin. Should he fail in either of these duties then he would answer before the divine tribunal for the souls lost through his negligence.

For twenty-two years Ezechiel preached with great zeal and great success. When he began his ministry (in 593 B.C.) it was the opinion of the exiles that the kingdom of Juda would rally and gain its independence; that Jerusalem could never be taken; that surely a reverse of fortune for Babylon would bring about their repatriation. False prophets encouraged these foolish hopes. Ezechiel denounced these lying prophets, foretold the total conquest of Juda. He never ceased to warn his people against idolatry.

Besides idolatry there was another, and a more subtle danger to the faith of the exiles; namely, scepticism—questioning or murmuring against the revealed designs of God. The advocates of this heresy appealed to texts such as Exodus 20, 5: *I am Jahwe, thy God, mighty, jealous, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children . . .* They overstated the principle of solidarity there expressed; they read into these texts a form of fatalism; and this they made an excuse for neglecting religion and breaking the moral law. For long a popular expression of this attitude of mind had been current: *The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the teeth of the children are set on edge* (Jeremias 31, 29; Ezechiel 18, 2). Against this half truth Ezechiel preached the doctrines of God's perfect justice and of the individual's freedom to merit eternal reward or woe. On that as basis he then preached penance. He exhorted them to repent of their sins, and to accept the exile for the expiation of the national guilt which God intended it to be (1—24).

When Jerusalem fell in 586 B.C. the prophet was vindicated and his influence was increased. The theme of his

preaching is changed from that time onward. He speaks of the downfall of the pagan nations: Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre, Sidon, Egypt (25-32). The remainder of the Book of Ezechiel foretells the restoration of the chosen remnant; the end of the schism; the character of the Messias (33—39); the Messianic kingdom (40—48).

DANIEL (603—536 B.C.).

Even among his contemporaries Daniel was renowned for his holiness and wisdom. With Noe and Job he completes a trio of just men in Ezechiel 14, 14; 14, 20. And his wisdom was proverbial among the Babylonians: *Beold thou art wiser than Daniel* (Ezechiel 28, 3)—spoken in irony to the prince of Tyre. By his inspired knowledge and his wonderful miracles he prepared the heathen world for the coming of the Redeemer; Nabuchodonosor was forced to admit that Jahwe is the True God: *Verily your God is the God of gods . . .* (Daniel 2, 47). But he had a mission to his own people also: by his prophecies he strengthened the faith of the Jewish nation against the trials and persecutions of the trying years to come. Daniel spent his life in the royal court of Babylon, not among the exiles; and so his prophecies were written, not preached.

In 540 B.C. Daniel had a vision in which he saw four great beasts coming out of the Mediterranean Ocean. The first beast, a lioness with wings of an eagle, symbolised the then world empire of Babylon. The second, a devouring bear, symbolised the future empire of Persia. The third, a winged leopard with four heads, was Macedonia. The fourth, an unnamed beast with teeth of iron, crushed all the others beneath its feet; this was the future Roman Empire. Then appeared "*the Ancient of days*" (7, 9)—God, sitting in judgment. The fourth beast was slain and removed. The attendant angels presented to God "*the son of man*" (7, 13)—the Messias; and to Him was given all the kingdoms of the world. Thus God directed all the movements of secular history to the accomplishing of His plan of Redemption. This is the constant theme of all Daniel's prophecies.

In another vision in 538 B.C. Daniel saw a huge he-goat which attacked and vanquished a ram. The goat grew still greater, and the large horn between its eyes was broken.

From the broken horn arose four lesser horns; and from one of these again grew a fifth. Gabriel the Archangel explained the meaning of the vision: the ram was the king of Persia; the goat represented the future Macedonian world conqueror; the four lesser horns were the kingdoms which would be formed from the Macedonian Empire; the fifth horn denoted an astute and ruthless ruler who would slay many, persecute the Jews, and die prematurely for his impiety (chapter 8).

THE SEVENTY WEEKS

Later in the same year Daniel realised that the seventy years of exile foretold by Jeremias were now ended. The edict of liberation of Cyrus was not yet issued, however; and the prophet multiplied his austerities to win the divine mercy, and his prayers for the restoration of the Jewish nation and Capital and Temple. While he prayed Gabriel appeared to him in a vision, and gave him a revelation concerning the Redemption of the world—of which Redemption the return of the Exile was only a type or figure. This is the prophecy of the seventy weeks (of years) of Daniel 9, 24-27.

Seventy heptads of years (i.e. 490 years) have been determined by God as the time to elapse between the decree which will authorise the re-building of Jerusalem and the salvation of the world. Then sin shall be expiated; righteousness shall be established; the prophecies shall have their fulfilment; the Messiah will come; the New Covenant, foretold by Jeremias (31, 31) shall be introduced; the worship of the Old Law shall be abolished, and a new religion shall be revealed. During the first seven heptads (49 years) Jerusalem and its Temple shall be restored amid great hardship; for sixty-two heptads they shall remain. In the sixty-ninth heptad the Messiah shall be slain; the Chosen People shall be punished for their denial of Him by the destruction of their Capital and its Temple. The ruin of the Temple shall be complete and final (*).

*Textual differences in the Hebrew, Greek and Vulgate leave this passage (Daniel 9, 24-27) one of the most difficult in Holy Scripture. Their authors are not agreed as from where the seventy weeks of years begin. Some place the starting point in 458 B.C.—the first decree of Artaxerxes I (i Esdras 7, 12-26); thus Monsignor Pelt (*Histoire*, Vol. II, page 356). Others place it in 445 B.C. at the coming of Nehemias (2 Esdras 2, 5-9); thus Fillion (*Commentary on Daniel*). The Messianic nature and the doctrinal content of the prophecy are abundantly clear; but it contributes in nowise to the solution of New Testament chronology.

In 536 B.C. Daniel had his last recorded vision. In it was revealed to him an outline of the future of the Persian Empire; the conquest of it by a Macedonian (Alexander the Great); the rule of this conqueror's successors. Wars between the north (Syria) and the south (Egypt) shall ensue. A vile man, unworthy of royal rank shall rule Syria. He shall wage war on Egypt; persecute the Jewish people; profane the Temple of Jerusalem. Subsequent history shows the latter to have been Antiochus IV (Epiphanes) of Syria, who persecuted the Jews in the second century B.C. and attempted to extirpate the worship of the True God. He is a type of Antichrist, who will persecute the Church before the final consummation. From the type Daniel passes over to the antitype; and the concluding portion of this revelation (11, 36—12, 13) speaks of the end of the world.

Of Daniel's death nothing is known. By 536 B.C. he was an old man; and it is probable that he died in Babylonia.

Jewish and Christian tradition have always attributed to the prophet Isaias the authorship of the whole Book which has his name for title. This firm and constant tradition has Scriptural confirmation: Ben Sirach writes of Isaias that he "*comforted the mourners in Sion*" (Ecclesiasticus 48, 27)—a reference surely to the second part of the Book; and in the New Testament various passages of this second part are attributed to Isaias (e.g. St. Matthew 3, 3; 8, 17; 12, 17; etc.). Towards the end of the eighteenth century the 'higher critics' advanced the strange claim that this prophecy is the work not of one, but of two or three authors: Proto-Isaias (the first Isaias), who wrote chapters 1 to 40; Deutero-Isaias (the second Isaias), who wrote chapters 41 to 55; Trito-Isaias (the third Isaias), who wrote chapters 56 to 66.

The basic reason for this theory of the 'critics' is, of course, doctrinal and not literary; in other words, the theory is an attempt to buttress the principle of the rationalists that miracles are impossible. Now, it follows logically from the existence of a personal, all-powerful, all-knowing God that miracles and prophecy are possible. The existence of God and His attributes of infinite power and knowledge are proved, and the objections brought by un-

believers are refuted in any manual of Catholic Apologetics. (*)

As to the arguments of a literary character which are brought in support of the theory, these are best refuted by a study of the Book in question—*Isaias*. The summary given above, brief as it is, will suffice to show that it is a literary unity; carefully planned and skilfully composed; written when idolatry was practised in Jerusalem and therefore before the Exile; maintaining throughout the same lofty trend of theological thought. That another, or two succeeding authors should have added to the first forty chapters: preserved such doctrinal unity and such literary excellence; and concealed his or their identity for twenty-five centuries—is incredible.

Such vogue, however, did this theory enjoy that the arguments of the 'critics' were subjected to careful examination by the Biblical Commission. In five decisions *on the composition and author of the Book of Isaias* (29th June, 1908) the rationalist attacks on prophecy generally are impugned; and the arguments from language and style to prove a second or several authors of *Isaias* are pronounced not cogent—even when taken cumulatively. (†)

But the 'critics' continued their investigations into the literary origins of *Isaias*; and in recent years it is frequently asserted in non-Catholic commentaries that the Book of *Isaias* is a collection of fragments by various authors of various periods of Old Testament history down to the second century B.C. This extravagant conclusion is well refuted and the traditional view is well upheld in the most recent Catholic commentary on *Isaias*. (‡)

*For instance. *APOLOGETICS AND CATHOLIC DOCTRINE*. By the Most Rev. Archbishop Michael Sheehan, D.D. Dublin (M. H. Gill & Son, Ltd.) 2nd Edition, 1919. For *Prophecy* see Part I, pages 35-39.

†Denzinger-Bannwart. 15 ed. Numbers 2115-2119.

‡*THE BOOK OF ISAIAH*. By Rev. Edward J. Kissane, D.D., L.S.S., Dublin, 1941. Pages xxvi-xxxii).

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