

# The Bible Student.

CONTINUING

The Bible Student and Religious Outlook.

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**Dr. Davidson's Article on Prophecy.** The editor of *The Expository Times* speaks always wittingly and often wisely. In announcing the publication of the fourth volume of the new *Dictionary of the Bible*, he says, among other things: "The article on Prophecy fills forty-one columns. It is the finest work, we believe, that Professor DAVIDSON ever published." The editors of the *Union Magazine* express an equally high opinion. "One of the gems of the volume," they say, "is the long article (21 pp.) by the late Dr. A. B. DAVIDSON on Prophecy. Its fine insight and sympathy, combined with mature biblical scholarship and large and reverent outlook, entitle it to much the same foremost place as was accorded in a previous volume to Dr. SANDAY'S remarkable contribution on Jesus Christ. Dr. DAVIDSON leaves behind many things in the older view of prophecy, but not anything that pertains to its character as a true product of the Spirit of revelation." It is with the utmost diffidence that we differ from the judgment of such men as Dr. HARRINGS and Dr. ORR. But we cannot conceal from ourselves that our esti-

mate of this article is very different from that which they express. It does not seem to us "the finest work that Dr. DAVIDSON ever published." Dr. DAVIDSON never wrote anything that lacked distinction; and there are gleams of his wit and wisdom shining in this article. But it strikes us on the whole as, for him, an unusually perfunctory piece of work, in which he rather forces himself to cover the ground assigned him than pours out himself. Nor does it seem to us to "leave behind nothing that pertains to the character of prophecy as a true product of the Spirit of revelation." Dr. DAVIDSON assuredly revered the prophets as chosen servants of God in developing the religious life of the nation. But his treatment of prophecy strikes us as evaporating from it all that gave it to the prophets themselves, to the community which they addressed, and to the whole series of writers of Scripture, its character as a true product of the Spirit of revelation.

Two  
Contrasting  
Views as to  
The Data.

What was a prophet?  
What did a prophet  
think himself to be?  
What do the Scrip-  
tures represent a

prophet to have been? To the average Christian these three questions are one. On not merely adequate but compelling grounds he ascribes to the Scriptural representations supreme authority as the Word of God. On equally compelling grounds, including the testimony of Scripture itself, he looks upon the prophets' representation of their own character as thoroughly trustworthy. What the Scriptures declare a prophet to be; what the prophets represent themselves as being: that he understands the prophets really to have been. There is abroad among us, however, a very different point of view, to which these three questions appear entirely different questions. To it, what the Scriptures represent a prophet to be is one thing; what the prophet thought of himself is another thing; and what a prophet really was is a totally different thing from either. To it, what the Scriptures represent a prophet to be is only an entertaining topic in the history of religious opinion; it is interesting to know how this class of men were thought of in this nation or that, in this age or that, in this stage of religious development or that. What the prophet thought of himself is to this point of view only an absorbing problem of religious psychology; it is a rarely attractive subject of investigation—to penetrate into the depths of such an abnormal consciousness and estimate its significance to the prophet himself as well as to his contemporaries. What a prophet really was, on the other hand, is not to be determined by what he was thought to be by either himself or others, but only by a broad induction based on kindred phenomena as they have emerged in the total history of mankind. Now the peculiarity of Dr. DAVIDSON'S position is that it is not identical with either of these contrasting atti-

tudes, but is a curious and, let us say it frankly, inconsequent mixture of the two. He does not treat the three questions we have posited, as identical; he does not appear to be willing to accept the Scriptural representation *simpliciter*, or the prophetic consciousness *simpliciter*, as a trustworthy account of what prophets and prophecy were. On the contrary, he treats these things as matters somewhat apart from the question in hand and does not implicitly adopt their guidance. But on the other hand, he does not escape from them altogether and permits himself to be more or less affected by them. The consequence is that he gives us no very consistent picture, and leaves us now and again very much in the mists.

We thankfully recognize the reverence for Hebrew prophecy which filled Dr. DAVIDSON'S mind.

It was, he tells us (p. 107a), "the deepest movement of the human spirit and in many ways most mysterious;" the results of it "remain an imperishable heritage of the race." "The early waters of prophetism," he tells us again (p. 115a), "may have been somewhat turbid, but they gradually ran clear, and became that stream of ethical prophecy to which there is nothing like in the religious history of mankind." He scouts the attempt of some to represent the prophets as a despised caste of fanatics, to be identified with whom was in the case of a Saul or an Amos a matter of disgrace. "The respect with which Amos mentions prophets elsewhere," he remarks, "as God's greatest gift to his people (ii. 11; iii. 7) is sufficient evidence of his feeling" (pp. 109b, 110a). He recognizes without hesitation the unambiguous testimony which both the

prophets themselves and the Scriptures at large bear to them as but mouth-pieces of God. "Both [prophets and people]," he tells us, "believed that the prophet was one who spoke the word of Jehovah" (p. 113a). "The prophets asseverate very strongly that it is the word of God which they speak" (p. 115a). "An extraordinarily lofty place is assigned here [Deut. xviii. 9 seq.] to the prophet; his words are as much the words of Jehovah as if Jehovah spoke them immediately with his own voice" (p. 114a). "So all the prophets, e. g., Is. xxx. 2, xxxi. 1, regard themselves as the 'mouth' of Jehovah" (p. 114b). The New Testament, he frankly allows, looked on the prophetic word as the direct word of God whose fulfilment was as certain as God is faithful and true.

**Dr. Davidson on The Predictive Element.** In particular, the element of prediction in prophecy receives at Dr. Davidson's hands a much less grudging recognition than it has been customary to accord it among men of his school. In this he seems to be influenced by the argument of GIESEBRECHT, in his *Berufsbegabung der alttest. Propheten*, who has led a much needed reaction in this matter. It is not merely the presence of prediction in prophecy that he recognizes, but its primacy. He asserts this not only explicitly but repeatedly. "The prophets never cease to be 'seers;' their face is always turned to the future. They stand in the councils of Jehovah (Amos iii.; Jer. xxiii. 22), and it is what he is about to do that they declare to men. Their moral and religious teaching is, so to speak, secondary and due to the occasion" (p. 111a). "If any prophetic book be examined, such as Amos or Hosea iv.-xiv., or any of

the complete prophetic discourses contained in a prophet's book, such as Isaiah i., v., vi., ii.-iv., it will appear that the ethical and religious teaching is always secondary, and that the essential thing in the book or discourse is the prophet's outlook into the future. . . . The prophet's religious teaching regarding the nature of Jehovah, and the duty and sin of the people, is subordinate, and meant to sustain his outlook into the future and awaken the mind of the people to the truth of it" (p. 119a). Again (p. 113a), "In Amos iii. 7, 8, it is said, 'The Lord God doeth nothing without revealing his counsel to his servants, the prophets.' Jeremiah (xxiii. 22) varies this by saying that the prophet stands 'in the council' of Jehovah, and knows his purpose (Job. xv. 8). The passage states two things, viz: that Jehovah reveals his mind and purpose to the prophets, and that he does so particularly in reference to the future. When great events are about to happen, involving the destinies of the people, the sensibility of the prophet is quickened and feels their approach, and he stands forth to announce them. . . . Among other passages referring to prophecy on its predictive side, Is. xli. 4, 21 ff. (cf. xlv. 18, 19) deserves mention. Here predictive prophecy is claimed for Jehovah and Israel and denied to the idols and their peoples, and the power to predict as well as the fact of having truly predicted is proof that Jehovah is God."

**Dr. Davidson On Messianic Prophecy.** Doubtlessly connected with this revised attitude towards the predictive element in prophecy is the somewhat remarkable recognition of a wealth of directly Messianic prophecies (p. 124b). "In these," Dr. DAVIDSON

explains, as distinguished from "indirectly Messianic prophecies," "the prophet or writer had the expected future Messiah actually present to his own mind." In the "indirectly Messianic prophecies," on the other hand, "the writer had some Old Testament officer or personage in his mind, but spoke of him according to the idea of his office or function or character; and this ideal is transferred to Christ in the New Testament as being actually realized only in him, or at least in him first." It is not our purpose in quoting this to point out the inadequacy of this definition of indirect Messianic prophecies. It obviously removes them from the category of predictions altogether and treats them as more or less violent New Testament applications to Jesus of passages which have no inherent relation to the Messiah whatever. The offense of this is increased by Dr. DAVIDSON'S further remark that the New Testament does not recognize any class of indirect Messianic prophecies; for, God being the speaker in the Old Testament, the person in whom the language is fulfilled must be the person of whom it was spoken. Dr. DAVIDSON apparently cannot go with the New Testament in this; but neither does he assent to what he deems the attitude of the Hebrew writer, who had solely in his mind "either the expected future Messiah, or some Old Testament person." Accordingly *he* divides Messianic prophecies into the direct and indirect,—in the former of which the prophet described the Messiah he expected, and in the latter of which the New Testament writers see descriptions of the Messiah they had found. The point which we are now making concerns the unexpectedly large number of prophecies which Dr. DAVIDSON is willing to account direct Messianic

prophecies. He enumerates as examples of such prophecies: "Is. vii. ix., xi.; Mic. iv., v.; Jer. xxiii., 5, 6, xxx. 9; Ezek. xvii. 22, 24, xxxiv. 23 seq., xxxvii. 22, 28; Zech. iii. 8, vi. 12, ix. 9 seq.; Ps. ii. lxxii., cx., and other passages." The inclusion in this list of Is. vii. and Ps. ii. is to be noted. It is easy, to be sure, to make too much of this generous recognition of direct Messianic prophecies. After all, this is only a recognition that in these passages the prophet drew a picture of the Messiah he looked or longed for, and not of some contemporary person or office. Anybody can draw a picture of what he hopes for. The significance of such an anticipation or hope in the prophets depends, therefore, entirely on Dr. DAVIDSON'S view of the nature of the prophetic inspiration and the source of predictive prophecy. And it must be confessed that Dr. DAVIDSON'S view of these things leaves something to be desired.

For it is time that we should advertise the reader that we have hitherto been selecting from Dr. DAVIDSON'S article only one class of passages, which we must regretfully confess does not form the warp and woof of the fabric, though we cheerfully recognize that it gives it much of its color and pattern. The web into which these passages are woven may be divined by noting an astonishing fact that meets the reader at the outset of the article. The article opens naturally with a section on the "origin of prophecy," which fills the first two columns. Not a word is said in this section of a divine call or a divine initiative. "Prophecy" it seems did not originate in God. Nay, there is no question of "God" at all in this section, but only of "a

God or gods;" and no question of a message graciously sent by God to his people, through his "mouth," the prophet, but only of attempts by men of all peoples and all ages to divine the purpose of the Divinity towards whom they strained upwards! Will it be credited?—the section on "the origin of prophecy" is given entirely to a discussion of omens and divination, to that "something to which the general name of prophecy might be given" which has originated from "beliefs and feelings common to men everywhere." It is not as bad as that throughout the article; but the note thus struck vibrates through the whole. Prophecy is everywhere approached as a human phenomenon appearing in Israel, which may or may not have something divine at the back of it. "To us now," remarks Dr. DAVIDSON (p. 117a), "with our ideas of the prophet, and looking back to him as a great isolated and almost miraculous personage, divinely accredited" . . . certain cautions are to be recommended in dealing with Old Testament prophets. Whence it is clear that Dr. DAVIDSON did not himself think of a prophet as a "miraculous personage:" he speaks deprecatingly of our permitting ourselves to be misled by looking upon him as even "almost a miraculous personage." But nothing is clearer than that the prophet looked upon himself and was looked upon by his contemporaries and by the whole body of Biblical writers, including our Lord himself, as an entirely "miraculous personage;" and, as we have seen, Dr. DAVIDSON allows this.

**Dr. Davidson's Account of Prediction.** Certainly prediction of future occurrences, if real, is a "miraculous" accomplishment. And we have seen that Dr. DAVIDSON allows that prediction

was of the very essence of Hebrew prophecy. He appears moreover to allow that these prophets' predictions were, within certain limits, real predictions: "in general, apart from details, the main predictions of the prophets regarding Israel and the nations were verified in history" (p. 120b). But when the question arises, "How are the prophetic anticipations as to the future to be explained?" there is a notable faltering. The answer that the prophets themselves give to this question is precise and unhesitating. They say the Lord has revealed the future to his people through his servants the prophets. Dr. DAVIDSON is not so ready with his answer—or with this answer. He approaches the question with a negative *sortes*. These prophetic "anticipations or certainties," he tells us, "cannot be explained as the conclusions of a shrewd political insight;" nor as "the pessimistic forebodings of a declining and exhausted age;" nor yet, least of all, as *post eventum* apparent prophecies; nor even yet (as GIESEBRECHT, on whom Dr. DAVIDSON leans hard in this section, explained them) as the product of a natural faculty of presentiment common to men. How, then, are they to be explained? Dr. DAVIDSON will not tell us plainly. He proceeds from this point with suggestions as to a complex process in the formation of presentiments:—"first, a peculiar temperament, suggesting events sad or joyous; then certain facts presented to the mind; and then the unconscious operation of the mind on these facts, the whole resulting in the presentiment or vaticination." Now, says he, "in point of fact such presentiments as we can observe to be authentic are chiefly products of the conscience or moral reason; and Jeremiah, as has been said, insists that true prophecy

in general is based on moral grounds and consists of moral judgments; and certainly all the prophets, in analyzing their intuitions of the future and laying them before the people, usually present them in the form of a moral syllogism" (p. 121a). So far as we can see, this is Dr. DAVIDSON'S sole suggestion as to the account to be given of prophetic anticipations. This is certainly, however, not the way the prophets understood themselves or represented themselves to have arrived at their knowledge of future occurrences. Nor will it fit all the instances of predictions which even Dr. DAVIDSON admits as such. What moral syllogism would have assured Jeremiah that Hananiah would die within the year (Jer. xxviii.)?

**Were There  
Any True  
Prophets?**

When we weigh the idea of prophecy which Dr. DAVIDSON presents to us in such expositions, we cannot be surprised to learn that he considers that "a hard-and-fast line of demarcation between true and false prophecy can hardly be drawn" (p. 116b). His general idea of prophecy in Israel, he tells us, is that it is the "embodiment of a religious-national spirit." The Spirit of God, it seems, is responsible only for "the personal exaltation of the prophet himself, who has become another man, and not specially for the contents of his utterance" (p. 114b): the violent impulse to speak or act alone, and not what is said or done, is to be ascribed to Him. Now, Dr. DAVIDSON explains, "when the spirit that animated the prophet pursued predominantly national ends, he was a false prophet; when the ends pursued were religious and ethical, the prophet was true, because in the religion of Jehovah the national was transient, and the ethical abid-

ing" (p. 116b). But it is quite certain that the prophet himself did not consider himself the "embodiment of a religious-national spirit," but the exponent of the Spirit of Jehovah! Nor did he consider himself differentiated from the false prophet merely by a difference of emphasis on one or the other side of their common teaching; but fundamentally and in origin. Micaiah had the Spirit of God; the false prophets a lying spirit (I. Kings xxii. 22, 23). Ezekiel really had the Spirit of God; the false prophets were deceived (Ezek. xiii. 14; xiv. 9). Jeremiah spoke the words of Jehovah; the false prophets spoke out of their own hearts (Jer. xxiii. 16, 21, 25, 26). The plain truth is that the conception of a prophet which Dr. DAVIDSON offers to us lies not far away from Jeremiah's conception of a false prophet. According to Dr. DAVIDSON, in a word, all prophets speak out of their own hearts. They differ from other men only in that they are endowed with a fervid "religious-national spirit." They differ among themselves only as it is the national or the religious element in this spirit that most possesses them. The true prophet is, thus, simply the highly religious man—the religious genius,—who by virtue of his deeper religious nature becomes a religious authority to his fellow-man. But alas! the experience of the world has been that not every highly religious man is a safe guide to religious truth! Not Israel alone possessed religious geniuses. But only in Israel have the religious geniuses proved to be prophets—that is right guides in religion to the whole world. How can this fact be accounted for, save as the prophets themselves accounted for it,—that they were not merely exceptionally religious-minded men, but truly the organs of Jehovah, who spoke in and through

them; the men, the servants, the messengers, the interpreters of God; speaking not their words but his; whose "thus saith Jehovah" was not a mere "prophetic mannerism" (p. 109b), but the expression of a real fact?

**Dr. Davidson's Failure.** We can hardly, therefore, think that in his revision of the idea of prophecy, Dr. DAVIDSON has "left behind nothing that pertains to its character as a true product of the Spirit of revelation." The whole drift of his discussion appears to us, on the contrary, to be towards the reduction of the revelational value of the prophetic phenomena. Dr. DAVIDSON has possibly not been able to go the whole length with the naturalizing tendency working among us; but neither has he been able to resist its current. The result is that his article is a tissue of inconsistencies, and presents no clear view of the nature of prophecy or of the inspiration of the prophets. He allows, for instance, that prediction is the essence of prophecy, while its religious and moral teaching is secondary; and then he does not know what to do with these predictions. He asserts in another breath that the prophet was essentially a national-religious teacher; and finds himself unable to distinguish between the false and the true—nay, in danger of pronouncing all the early prophets at least, by his own definition, false. For he is forced to allow (p. 110b) that it was not until a comparatively late date that that preponderating weight was given by any prophet to the religious element over the national, by which alone, in his view, the true prophet was distinguished from the false. As one reads through these pages he is more and more deeply oppressed with the feeling that the light that is in them is too deeply hidden beneath the

bushel of preconceived hesitations and doubts to give forth any clear shining. The prophetic consciousness—the prophet's testimony to himself and to his own relation to the divine Instructor—is the only safe starting point for an investigation of the nature of prophecy. It is the greatest service that KÖNIG has done to this generation, that he has made this clear. Dr. DAVIDSON, however, has not taken his start from this prophetic consciousness, but from ethnic phenomena more or less similar to prophecy; and has thus begun with an assumption fatal to any proper estimate of the prophet's claims. If we begin to study the nature of money by confusing coins and counterfeits we shall have a hard time in reaching a sound induction as to its value; and whatever estimate we are able to form of its value is sure to be a "debased" one. B. B. W.

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**Inquiry Legitimate.** "It is the glory of God to conceal a matter." To conceal is His right. Further, this concealment is in manifold ways for our advantage. But it does not follow that investigation is always an impertinence. Much will depend upon the spirit in which it is prosecuted and the end at which it aims. Apparently, God conceals some things merely in order to awaken curiosity and to provoke to rational and reverent inquiry. He who has no pleasure in fools, certainly has no pleasure in intellectual torpidity, and has put no premium upon mental stagnation. He not only permits us, he even, as it were, forces us to inquire. To a lethargic, sleeping Church, sunk in the arms of mere intellectual indolence, which it has mistaken for faith, he sends bad dreams until she awakes. By the riddles of his word