

A Survey of the Old Testament
Extracted from the writings of
Matthew Henry
by
Stanford E. Murrell

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Matthew Henry's Commentary

Genesis

We have now before us the holy Bible, or book, for so bible signifies. We call it the book, by way of eminency; for it is incomparably the best book that ever was written, the book of books, shining like the sun in the firmament of learning, other valuable and useful books, like the moon and stars, borrowing their light from it. We call it the holy book, because it was written by holy men, and indited by the Holy Ghost; it is perfectly pure from all falsehood and corrupt intention; and the manifest tendency of it is to promote holiness among men. The great things of God's law and gospel are here written to us, that they might be reduced to a greater certainty, might spread further, remain longer, and be transmitted to distant places and ages more pure and entire than possibly they could be by report and tradition: and we shall have a great deal to answer for if these things which belong to our peace, being thus committed to us in black and white, be neglected by us as a strange and foreign thing, Hos 8:12. The scriptures, or writings of the several inspired penmen, from Moses down to St. John, in which divine light, like that of the morning, shone gradually (the sacred canon being now completed), are all put together in this blessed Bible, which, thanks be to God, we have in our hands, and they make as perfect a day as we are to expect on this side of heaven. Every part was good, but all together very good. This is the light that shines in a dark place 2 Peter 1:19, and a dark place indeed the world would be without the Bible.

We have before us that part of the Bible which we call the Old Testament, containing the acts and monuments of the church from the creation almost to the coming of Christ in the flesh, which was about four thousand years-- the truths then revealed, the laws then enacted, the devotions then paid, the prophecies then given, and the events which concerned that distinguished body, so far as God saw fit to preserve to us the knowledge of them. This is called a testament, or covenant (Diatheke)(NT:1242), because it was a settled declaration of the will of God concerning man in a federal way, and had its force from the designed death of the great testator, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, Rev 8:8. It is called the Old Testament, with relation to the New, which does not cancel and supersede it, but crown and perfect it, by the bringing in of that better hope which was typified and foretold in it; the Old Testament still remains glorious, though the New far exceeds in glory, 2 Cor 3:9. We have before us that part of the Old Testament which we call the Pentateuch, or five books of Moses, that servant of the Lord who excelled all the other prophets, and typified the great prophet. In our Saviour's distribution of the books of the Old Testament into the law, the prophets, and the psalms, or Hagiographa,(NT:40;NT:1124) these are the law; for they contain not only the laws given to Israel, in the last four, but the laws given to Adam, to Noah, and to Abraham, in the first. These five books were, for aught we know, the first that ever were written; for we have not the least mention of any writing in all the book of Genesis, nor till God bade Moses write Ex 17:14; and some think Moses himself never learned to write till God set him his copy in the writing of the ten Commandments upon the tables of stone. However, we are sure these books are the most ancient writings now extant, and therefore best able to give us a satisfactory account of the most ancient things.

We have before us the first and longest of those five books, which we call Genesis, written, some think, when Moses was in Midian, for the instruction and comfort of his suffering brethren in Egypt: I rather think he wrote it in the wilderness, after he had been in the mount with God, where, probably, he received full and particular instructions for the writing of it. And, as he

framed the tabernacle, so he did the more excellent and durable fabric of this book, exactly according to the pattern shown him in the mount, into which it is better to resolve the certainty of the things herein contained than into any tradition which possibly might be handed down from Adam to Methuselah, from him to Shem, from him to Abraham, and so to the family of Jacob. Genesis is a name borrowed from the Greek. It signifies the original, or generation: fitly is this book so called, for it is a history of originals-- the creation of the world, the entrance of sin and death into it, the invention of arts, the rise of nations, and especially the planting of the church, and the state of it in its early days. It is also a history of generations-- the generations of Adam, Noah, Abraham, etc., not endless, but useful genealogies. The beginning of the New Testament is called Genesis too Matt 1:1, *Biblos* (NT:976) *geneseos*, (NT:1078) the book of the genesis, or generation, of Jesus Christ. Blessed be God for that Book which shows us our remedy, as this opens our wound. Lord, open our eyes, that we may see the wondrous things both of thy law and gospel!

Matthew Henry's Commentary

Exodus

Moses (the servant of the Lord in writing for him as well as in acting for him-- with the pen of God as well as with the rod of God in his hand) having, in the first book of his history, preserved and transmitted the records of the church, while it existed in private families, comes, in this second book, to give us an account of its growth into a great nation; and, as the former furnishes us with the best economics, so this with the best politics. The beginning of the former book shows us how God formed the world for himself; the beginning of this shows us how he formed Israel for himself, and both show forth his praise, Isa 43:21. There we have the creation of the world in history, here the redemption of the world in type. The Greek translators called this book Exodus (which signifies a departure or going out) because it begins with the story of the going out of the children of Israel from Egypt. Some allude to the names of this and the foregoing book, and observe that immediately after Genesis, which signifies the beginning or original, follows Exodus, which signifies a departure; for a time to be born is immediately succeeded by a time to die. No sooner have we made our entrance into the world than we must think of making our exit, and going out of the world. When we begin to live we begin to die. The forming of Israel into a people was a new creation. As the earth was, in the beginning, first fetched from under water, and then beautified and replenished, so Israel was first by an almighty power made to emerge out of Egyptian slavery, and then enriched with God's law and tabernacle.

This book gives us,

I. The accomplishment of the promises made before to Abraham (ch. 1-19), and then,

II. The establishment of the ordinances which were afterwards observed by Israel (ch. 20-40). Moses, in this book, begins, like Caesar, to write his own Commentaries; nay, a greater, a far greater, than Caesar is here. But henceforward the penman is himself the hero, and gives us the history of those things of which he was himself an eye and ear-witness, et quorum pars magna fuit-- and in which he bore a conspicuous part. There are more types of Christ in this book than perhaps in any other book of the Old Testament; for Moses wrote of him, John 5:46. The way of man's reconciliation to God, and coming into covenant and communion with him by a Mediator, is here variously represented; and it is of great use to us for the illustration of the New Testament, now that we have that to assist us in the explication of the Old.

Matthew Henry's Commentary

Leviticus

There is nothing historical in all this book of Leviticus except the account which it gives us of the consecration of the priesthood (ch. 8-9), of the punishment of Nadab and Abihu, by the hand of God, for offering strange fire (ch. 10), and of Shelomith's son, by the hand of the magistrate, for blasphemy (ch. 24). All the rest of the book is taken up with the laws, chiefly the ecclesiastical laws, which God gave to Israel by Moses, concerning their sacrifices and offerings, their meats and drinks, and divers washings, and the other peculiarities by which God set that people apart for himself, and distinguished them from other nations, all which were shadows of good things to come, which are realized and superseded by the gospel of Christ. We call the book Leviticus, from the Septuagint, because it contains the laws and ordinances of the levitical priesthood (as it is called, Heb 7:11), and the ministrations of it.

The Levites were principally charged with these institutions, both to do their part and to teach the people theirs. We read, in the close of the foregoing book, of the setting up of the tabernacle, which was to be the place of worship; and, as that was framed according to the pattern, so must the ordinances of worship be, which were there to be administered. In these the divine appointment was as particular as in the former, and must be as punctually observed. The remaining record of these abrogated laws is of use to us, for the strengthening of our faith in Jesus Christ, as the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, and for the increase of our thankfulness to God, that by him we are freed from the yoke of the ceremonial law, and live in the times of reformation.

Matthew Henry's Commentary

Numbers

The titles of the five books of Moses, which we use in our Bibles, are all borrowed from the Greek translation of the Seventy, the most ancient version of the Old Testament that we know of. But the title of this book only we turn into English; in all the rest we retain the Greek word itself, for which difference I know no reason but that the Latin translators have generally done the same. Otherwise this book might as well have been called Arithmoi,(NT:706) the Greek title, as the first Genesis, and the second Exodus; or these might as well have been translated, and called, the first the Generation, or Original, the second the Out-let, or Escape, as this Numbers.-- This book was thus entitled because of the numbers of the children of Israel, so often mentioned in this book, and so well worthy to give a title to it, because it was the remarkable accomplishment of God's promise to Abraham that his seed should be as the stars of heaven for multitude. It also relates to two numberings of them, one at mount Sinai (ch. 1), the other in the plains of Moab, thirty-nine years after (ch. 26). And not three men the same in the last account that were in the first. The book is almost equally divided between histories and laws, intermixed.

We have here,

I. The histories of the numbering and marshalling of the tribes (ch. 1-4), the dedication of the altar and Levites (ch. 7, 8), their march (ch. 9, 10), their murmuring and unbelief, for which they were sentenced to wander forty years in the wilderness (ch. 11-14), the rebellion of Korah (ch. 16, 17), the history of the last year of the forty (ch. 20-26), the conquest of Midian, and the settlement of the two tribes (ch. 31, 32), with an account of their journeys (ch. 33),

II. Divers laws about the Nazarites, etc. (ch. 5, 6); and again about the priests' charge, etc. (ch. 18, 19), feasts (ch. 28, 29), and vows (ch. 30), and relating to their settlement in Canaan (ch. 27, 34, 35, 36).

An abstract of much of this book we have in a few words in Ps 95:10, Forty years long was I grieved with this generation; and an application of it to ourselves in Heb 4:1, Let us fear lest we seem to come short. Many considerable nations there were now in being, that dwelt in cities and fortified towns, of which no notice is taken, no account kept, by the sacred history: but very exact records are kept of the affairs of a handful of people, that dwelt in tents, and wandered strangely in a wilderness, because they were the children of the covenant. For the Lord's portion is his people, Jacob is the lot of his inheritance.

Matthew Henry's Commentary

Deuteronomy

This book is a repetition of very much both of the history and of the laws contained in the three foregoing books, which repetition Moses delivered to Israel (both by word of mouth, that it might affect, and by writing, that it might abide) a little before his death. There is no new history in it but that of the death of Moses in the last chapter, nor any new revelation to Moses, for aught that appears, and therefore the style here is not, as before, The Lord spoke unto Moses, saying. But the former laws are repeated and commented upon, explained and enlarged, and some particular precepts added to them, with copious reasonings for the enforcing of them: in this Moses was divinely inspired and assisted, so that this is as truly the word of the Lord by Moses as that which was spoken to him with an audible voice out of the tabernacle of the congregation, Lev 1:1. The Greek interpreters call it Deuteronomy, which signifies the second law, or a second edition of the law, not with amendments, for there needed none, but with additions, for the further direction of the people in divers cases not mentioned before. Now,

I. It was much for the honour of the divine law that it should be thus repeated; how great were the things of that law which was thus inculcated, and how inexcusable would those be by whom they were counted as a strange thing! Hos 8:12.

II. There might be a particular reason for the repeating of it now; the men of that generation to which the law was first given were all dead, and a new generation had sprung up, to whom God would have it repeated by Moses himself, that, if possible, it might make a lasting impression upon them. Now that they were just going to take possession of the land of Canaan, Moses must read the articles of agreement to them, that they might know upon what terms and conditions they were to hold and enjoy that land, and might understand that they were upon their good behaviour in it.

III. It would be of great use to the people to have those parts of the law thus gathered up and put together which did more immediately concern them and their practice; for the laws which concerned the priests and Levites, and the execution of their offices, are not repeated: it was enough for them that they were once delivered.

But, in compassion to the infirmities of the people, the laws of more common concern are delivered a second time. Precept must be upon precept, and line upon line, Isa 28:10. The great and needful truths of the gospel should be often pressed upon people by the ministers of Christ. To write the same things (says Paul, Phil 3:1) to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe. What God has spoken once we have need to hear twice, to hear many times, and it is well if, after all, it be duly perceived and regarded. In three ways this book of Deuteronomy was magnified and made honourable—

1. The king was to write a copy of it with his own hand, and to read therein all the days of his life, ch. 17, 18, 19.
2. It was to be written upon great stones plastered, at their passing over Jordan, Deut 27:2-3.
3. It was to be read publicly every seventh year, at the feast of tabernacles, by the priests, in the audience of all Israel, Deut 31:9, etc. The gospel is a kind of Deuteronomy, a second law, a

remedial law, a spiritual law, a law of faith; by it we are under the law of Christ, and it is a law that makes the comers thereunto perfect.

This book of Deuteronomy begins with a brief rehearsal of the most remarkable events that had befallen the Israelites since they came from Mount Sinai. In the fourth chapter we have a most pathetic exhortation to obedience. In the twelfth chapter, and so on to the twenty-seventh, are repeated many particular laws, which are enforced (ch. 27 and 28) with promises and threatenings, blessings and curses, formed into a covenant, ch. 29 and 30. Care is taken to perpetuate the remembrance of these things among them (ch. 31), particularly by a song (ch. 32), and so Moses concludes with a blessing, ch. 33. All this was delivered by Moses to Israel in the last month of his life. The whole book contains the history but of two months; compare Deut 1:3 with Josh 4:19, the latter of which was the thirty days of Israel's mourning for Moses; see how busy that great and good man was to do good when he knew that his time was short, how quick his motion when he drew near his rest. Thus we have more recorded of what our blessed Saviour said and did in the last week of his life than in any other. The last words of eminent persons make or should make deep impressions. Observe, for the honour of this book, that when our Saviour would answer the devil's temptations with, It is written, he fetched all his quotations out of this book, Matt 4:4,7,10.

Matthew Henry's Commentary

Joshua

We have now before us the history of the Jewish nation in this book and those that follow it to the end of the book of Esther. These books, to the end of the books of the Kings, the Jewish writers call the first book of the prophets, to bring them within the distribution of the books of the Old Testament, into the Law, the Prophets, and the Chetubim (OT:3791), or Hagiographa,(NT:40;NT:1124), Luke 24:44. The rest they make part of the Hagiographa. For, though history is their subject, it is justly supposed that prophets were their penmen. To those books that are purely and properly prophetic the name of the prophet is prefixed, because the credibility of the prophecies depended much upon the character of the prophets; but these historical books, it is probable, were collections of the authentic records of the nation, which some of the prophets (and the Jewish church was for many ages more or less continually blessed with such) were divinely directed and helped to put together for the service of the church to the end of the world; as their other officers, so their historiographers, had their authority from heaven.-- It should seem that though the substance of the several histories was written when the events were fresh in memory, and written under a divine direction, yet, under the same direction, they were put into the form in which we now have them by some other hand, long afterwards, probably all by the same hand, or about the same time. The grounds of the conjecture are,

1. Because former writings are so often referred to, as the Book of Jasher (Josh 10:13, and 2 Sam 1:18), the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel and Judah, and the books of Gad, Nathan, and Iddo.
2. Because the days when the things were done are spoken of sometimes as days long since passed; as 1 Sam 9:9, He that is now called a prophet was formerly called a seer. And,
3. Because we so often read of things remaining unto this day; as stones Josh 4:9; 7:26; 8:29; 10:27; 1 Sam 6:18, names of places Josh 5:9; 7:26; Judg 1:26; 15:19; 18:12; 2 Kings 14:7, rights and possessions Judg 1:21; 1 Sam 27:6, customs and usages 1 Sam 5:5; 2 Kings 17:41, which clauses have been since added to the history by the inspired collectors for the confirmation and illustration of it to those of their own age.

And, if one may offer a mere conjecture, it is not unlikely that the historical books, to the end of the Kings, were put together by Jeremiah the prophet, a little before the captivity; for it is said of Ziklag 1 Sam 27:6 that it pertains to the kings of Judah (which style began after Solomon and ended in the captivity) unto this day. And it is still more probable that those which follow were put together by Ezra the scribe, some time after the captivity. However, though we are in the dark concerning their authors, we are in no doubt concerning their authority; they were a part of the oracles of God, which were committed to the Jews, and were so received and referred to by our Saviour and the apostles.

In the five books of Moses we had a very full account of the rise, advance, and constitution, of the Old-Testament church, the family out of which it was raised, the promise, that great charter by which it was incorporated, the miracles by which it was built up, and the laws and ordinances by which it was to be governed, from which one would conceive and

expectation of its character and state very different from what we find in this history. A nation that had statutes and judgments so righteous, one would think, should have been very holy; and a nation what had promises so rich should have been very happy. But, alas! a great part of the history is a melancholy representation of their sins and miseries; for the law made nothing perfect, but this was to be done by the bringing in of the better hope. And yet, if we compare the history of the Christian church with its constitution, we shall find the same cause for wonder, so many have been its errors and corruptions; for neither does the gospel make any thing perfect in this world, but leaves us still in expectation of a better hope in the future state.

We have next before us the book of Joshua, so called, perhaps, not because it was written by him, for that is uncertain. Dr. Lightfoot thinks that Phinehas wrote it. Bishop Patrick is clear that Joshua wrote it himself. However that be, it is written concerning him, and, if any other wrote it, it was collected out of his journals or memoirs. It contains the history of Israel under the command and government of Joshua, how he presided as general of their armies,

- I. 1. In their entrance into Canaan, ch. 1-5.
- II. 2. In their conquest of Canaan, ch. 6-12.
- III. 3. In the distribution of the land of Canaan among the tribes of Israel, ch. 22-24.

In all which he was a great example of wisdom, courage, fidelity, and piety, to all that are in places of public trust. But this is not all the use that is to be made of this history. We may see in it,

1. Much of God and his providence-- his power in the kingdom of nature, his justice in punishing the Canaanites when the measure of their iniquity was full, his faithfulness to his covenant with the patriarchs, and his kindness to his people Israel, notwithstanding their provocations. We may see him as the Lord of Hosts determining the issues of war, and as the director of the lot, determining the bounds of men's habitations.
2. Much of Christ and his grace. Though Joshua is not expressly mentioned in the New Testament as a type of Christ, yet all agree that he was a very eminent one. He bore our Saviour's name, as did also another type of him, Joshua the high priest, Zech 6:11-12. The Septuagint, giving the name of Joshua a Greek termination, call him all along Iesous,(NT:2424) Jesus, and so he is called Acts 7:45, and Heb 4:8. Justin Martyr, one of the first writers of the Christian church (Dialog. cum Tryph. p. mihi 300), makes that promise in Ex 23:20, My angel shall bring thee into the place I have prepared, to point at Joshua; and these words, My name is in him, to refer to this, that his names should be the same with that of the Messiah. It signifies, He shall save. Joshua saves God's people from the Canaanites; our Lord Jesus saves them from their sins. Christ, as Joshua, is the captain of our salvation, a leader and commander of the people, to tread Satan under their feet, to put them in possession of the heavenly Canaan, and to give them rest, which (it is said, Heb 4:8) Joshua did not.

The Era of the Judges

Judge

Area

Scripture

Othniel	Judah	Judges 3:9
Ehud	Benjamin	Judges 3:15
Shamgar		Judges 3:31
Deborah	Ephraim	Judges 4:4-6
Barak	Naphtali	Judges 4:4-6
Gideon	Manasseh	Judges 6:11
Tola	Issachar	Judges 10:1
Jair	Gilead	Judges 10:3
Jephthah	Gilead	Judges 11:11
Ibzan	Bethlehem	Judges 12:8
Elon	Zebulun	Judges 12:11
Abdon	Ephraim	Judges 12:13
Samson	Dan	Judges 15:20
Eli	Levi	1 Samuel 1-4
Samuel	Ephraim	1 Samuel 7-19
Saul	Benjamin	1 Samuel 7-19

Matthew Henry's Commentary

Judges

This is called the Hebrew Shepher Shophtim,(OT:8199) the Book of Judges, which the Syriac and Arabic versions enlarge upon, and call it, The Book of the Judges of the Children of Israel; the judgments of that nation being peculiar, so were their judges, whose office differed vastly from that of the judges of other nations. The Septuagint entitles it only Kritai, (NT:2923) Judges. It is the history of the commonwealth of Israel, during the government of the judges from Othniel to Eli, so much of it as God saw fit to transmit to us. It contains the history (according to Dr. Lightfoot's computation) of 299 years, reckoning

to Othniel of Judah	forty years,
to Ehud of Benjamin	eighty years,
to Barak of Naphtali	forty years,
to Gideon of Manasseh	forty years,
to Abimelech his son	three years,
to Tola of Issachar	twenty-three,
to Jair of Manasseh	twenty-two,
to Jephtha of Manasseh	six,
to Ibzan of Judah	seven,
to Elon of Zebulun	ten,
to Abdon of Ephriam	eight,
to Samson of Dan	twenty,

in all 299. As for the years of their servitude, as were Eglon is said to oppress them eighteen years and Jabin twenty years, and so some others, those must be reckoned to fall in with some or other of the years of the judges. The judges here appear to have been of eight several tribes; that honour was thus diffused, until at last it centred in Judah. Eli and Samuel, the two judges that fall not within this book, were of Levi. It seems, there was no judge of Reuben or Simeon, Gad or Asher. The history of these judges in their order we have in this book to the end of ch. 16. And then in the last five chapters we have an account of some particular memorable events which happened, as the story of Ruth did Ruth 1:1 in the days when the judges ruled, but it is not certain in which judge's days; but they are put together at the end of the book, that the thread of the general history might not be interrupted. Now as to the state of the commonwealth of Israel during this period,

I. They do not appear here either so great or so good as one might have expected the character of such a peculiar people would be, that were governed by such laws and enriched by such promises. We find them wretchedly corrupted, and wretchedly oppressed by their neighbours about them, and nowhere in all the book, either in war or council, do they make any figure proportionable to their glorious entry into Canaan. What shall we say to it? God would hereby show us the lamentable imperfection of all persons and things under the sun, that we may look for complete holiness and happiness in the other world, and not in this. Yet,

II. We may hope that though the historian in this book enlarges most upon their provocations and grievances, yet there was a face of religion upon the land; and, however there were those among them that were drawn aside to idolatry, yet the tabernacle-service, according to the law of Moses, was kept up, and there were many that attended it.

III. Historians record not the common course of justice and commerce in a nation, taking that for granted, but only the wars and disturbances that happen; but the reader must consider the other, to balance the blackness of them. It should seem that in these times each tribe had very much its government in ordinary within itself, and acted separately, without one common head, or council, which occasioned many differences among themselves, and kept them from being or doing any thing considerable.

IV. The government of the judges was not constant, but occasional; when it is said that after Ehud's victory the land rested eighty years, and after Barak's forty, it is not certain that they lived, much less that they governed, so long; but they and the rest were raised up and animated by the Spirit of God to do particular service to the public when there was occasion, to avenge Israel of their enemies, and to purge Israel of their idolatries, which are the two things principally meant by their judging Israel. Yet Deborah, as a prophetess, was attended for judgment by all Israel, before there was occasion for her agency in war, Judg 4:4.

V. During the government of the judges, God was in a more especial manner Israel's king; so Samuel tells them when they were resolved to throw off this form of government, 1 Sam 12:12. God would try what his own law and the constitutions of that would do to keep them in order, and it proved that when there was no king in Israel every man did that which was right in his own eyes; he therefore, towards the latter end of this time, made the government of the judges more constant and universal that it was at first, and at length gave them David, a king after his own heart; then, and not till then, Israel began to flourish, which should make us very thankful for magistrates both supreme and subordinate, for they are ministers of God unto us for good. Four of the judges of Israel are canonized Heb 11:32, Gideon, Barak, Samson, and Jephtha. The Learned bishop Patrick thinks the prophet Samuel was the penman of this Book.

Matthew Henry's Commentary

Ruth

This short history of the domestic affairs of one particular family fitly follows the book of Judges (the events related here happening in the days of the judges), and fitly goes before the books of Samuel, because in the close it introduces David; yet the Jews, in their Bibles, separate it from both, and make it one of the five Megilloth,(OT:4039) or Volumes, which they put together towards the latter end, in this order: Solomon's Song, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther. It is probable that Samuel was the penman of it. It relates not miracles nor laws, wars nor victories, nor the revolutions of states, but the affliction first and afterwards the comfort of Naomi, the conversion first and afterwards the preferment of Ruth. Many such events have happened, which perhaps we may think as well worthy to be recorded; but these God saw fit to transmit the knowledge of to us; and even common historians think they have liberty to choose their subject. The design of this book is,

- I. To lead to providence, to show us how conversant it is about our private concerns, and to teach us in them all to have an eye to it, acknowledging God in all our ways and in all events that concern us. See 1 Sam 2:7-8; Ps 113:7-9.
- II. To lead to Christ, who descended from Ruth, and part of whose genealogy concludes the book, whence it is fetched into Matt 1. In the conversion of Ruth the Moabitess, and the bringing of her into the pedigree of the Messiah, we have a type of the calling of the Gentiles in due time into the fellowship of Christ Jesus our Lord. The afflictions of Naomi and Ruth we have an account of, ch. 1. Instances of their industry and humility, ch. 2. The bringing of them into an alliance with Boaz, ch. 3. And their happy settlement thereby, ch. 4. And let us remember the scene is laid in Bethlehem, the city where our Redeemer was born.

The Era of the Kings

The United Kingdom

1050=931 BC

Reign of Saul
1050-1011

1 Samuel 9:1
2 Samuel 1:27
1 Chronicles 8:33-10:14

Victories over

Amonnites
Philistines
Amalelites

Tiglath-pileser I
king of Assyria

Saul and David

Death of Saul at Mt. Gilboa

Agag, king of Amalek

Achish, king of Gath

Reign of David
1011-971

1 Samuel 16:1
1 Kings 2:11
1 Chronicles 11:1-29:30

Hiram, king of Tyre

Fall of Jerusalem

Victories and enlargement

Alliance with Hamath and Tyre

Revolt of Absalom

Reign of Solomon

1 Kings 1:11-11:43
1 Chronicles 29:20 –
2 Chronicles 9:31

Hiram, king of Tyre

Building of the Temple

Hadad the Edomite
In Egypt in exile

Visit of Queen of Sheba

Shishak, king of Egypt
(22nd Dynasty)

Death of Solomon

Division of the kingdom

Jeroboam in exile

Matthew Henry's Commentary

1 Samuel

This book, and that which follows it, bear the name of Samuel in the title, not because he was the penman of them (except of so much of them as fell within his own time, to the twenty-fifth chapter of the first book, in which we have an account of his death), but because the first book begins with a large account of him, his birth and childhood, his life and government; and the rest of these two volumes that are denominated from him contains the history of the reigns of Saul and David, who were both anointed by him. And, because the history of these two kings takes up the greatest part of these books, the Vulgar latin calls them the First and Second Books of the Kings, and the two that follow the Third and Fourth, which the titles in our English Bibles take notice of with an alias: otherwise called the First Book of the Kings, etc. The Septuagint calls them the first and second Book of the Kingdoms. It is needless to contend about it, but there is no occasion to vary from the Hebrew verity.

These two books contain the history of the last two of the judges, Eli and Samuel, who were not, as the rest, men of war, but priests (and so much of them is an appendix to the book of Judges), and of the first two of the kings, Saul and David, and so much of them is an entrance upon the history of the kings. They contain a considerable part of the sacred history, are sometimes referred to in the New Testament, and often in the titles of David's Psalms, which, if placed in their order, would fall in these books. It is uncertain who was the penman of them; it is probable that Samuel wrote the history of his own time, and that, after him, some of the prophets that were with David (Nathan as likely as any) continued it. This first book gives us a full account of Eli's fall and Samuel's rise and good government, ch. 1-8. Of Samuel's resignation of the government and Saul's advancement and mal-administration, ch. 9-15. The choice of David, his struggles with Saul, Saul's ruin at last, and the opening of the way for David to the throne, ch. 16-31. And these things are written for our learning.

Matthew Henry's Commentary

2 Samuel

This book is the history of the reign of king David. We had in the foregoing book an account of his designation to the government, and his struggles with Saul, which ended at length in the death of his persecutor. This book begins with his accession to the throne, and is entirely taken up with the affairs of the government during the forty years he reigned, and therefore is entitled by the Septuagint. The Third Book of the Kings. It gives us an account of David's triumphs and his troubles.

- I. His triumphs over the house of Saul (ch. 1-4), over the Jebusites and Philistines (ch. 5), at the bringing up of the ark (ch. 6 and 7), over the neighbouring nations that opposed him (ch. 8-10); and so far the history is agreeable to what we might expect from David's character and the choice made of him. But his cloud has a dark side.
- II. We have his troubles, the causes of them, his sin in the matter of Uriah (ch. 11 and 12), the troubles themselves from the sin of Amnon (ch. 13), the rebellion of Absalom (ch. 14-19) and of Sheba (ch. 20), and the plague in Israel for his numbering the people (ch. 24), besides the famine of the Gibeonites (ch. 21).

His son we have (ch. 22), and his words and worthies (ch. 23). Many things in his history are very instructive; but for the hero who is the subject of it, though in many instances he appears here very great, and very good, and very much the favourite of heaven, yet it must be confessed that his honour shines brighter in his Psalms than in his Annals.

THE ERA OF THE KINGS

The Divided Kingdom

**The Kingdom of Judah
931-586 BC**

Reign	Time Period	Scripture
Rehoboam	931-913	1 Kings 11:43-14:31 2 Chronicles 9:31-12:15
Abijam (Abijah)	913-911	1 Kings 14:31-15:8
Asa	911-875	1 Kings 15:8-24 2 Chronicles 14:1-16:14
Jehoshaphat	875-848	1 Kings 15:24-22:50
Jehoram (Joram)	848-841	2 Kings 8:25-9:28 2 Chronicles 21:1-20
Ahaziah	841	2 Kings 8:25-9:28
Athalia	841-836	2 Kings 11:1-20 2 Chronicles 22:19
Jehoash (Joash)	836-797	2 Kings 11:21-12:21 2 Chronicles 24:1-27
Amaziah	797-781	2 Kings 14:1-20 2 Chronicles 24:27-25:28
Uzziah (Azariah) <i>Ministry of Jonah</i> <i>Ministry of Amos</i>	781-740	2 Kings 14:21-15:7
Jotham	740-732	2 Kings 15:7-38 2 Chronicles 26:23-27:9
Ahaz	731-715	2 Kings 15:38-16:20 2 Chronicles 27:9-28:27

***End of the Northern Kingdom*
722 BC**

**The Kingdom of Judah
(cont.)**

Hezekiah	715-687	2 Kings 16:20-20:21 2 Chronicles 28:27-32:33
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Assyrians conquers Judah	701	
<i>Ministry of Nahum</i>		
Amon	642-640	2 Kings 21:18-26
Josiah	640-609	2 Kings 21:24-23:30 2 Chronicles 33:20-25
<i>Religious reforms</i>		
<i>Ministry of Jeremiah</i>		
<i>Ministry of Zephaniah</i>		
Jehoahaz (Shallum)	609	2 Kings 21:24-23:30 2 Chronicles 33:25-35:27
Jehoiakim	609-597	2 Kings 23:34-24:6
<i>Daniel in exile</i>		
<i>Ministry of Habakkuk</i>		
<i>Ministry of Ezekiel</i>		
Jehoiakin	587	2 Kings 24:6-25:30
<i>Jerusalem surrenders</i>		
<i>Jehoiakin deported</i>		
Zedekiah	597-586	2 Kings 24:17-25:7 2 Chronicles 36:10-21
<i>Jerusalem under siege</i>	589	
<i>Jerusalem falls</i>	586	
<i>Exile bgins</i>		

Matthew Henry's Commentary

1 Kings

Many histories are books of kings and their reigns, to which the affairs of their kingdoms are reduced; this is a piece of honour that has commonly been paid to crowned heads. The holy Scripture is the history of the kingdom of God among men, under the several administrations of it; but there the King is one and his name one. The particular history now before us accounts for the affairs of the kingdoms of Judah and Israel, yet with special regard to the kingdom of God among them; for still it is a sacred history, much more instructive and not less entertaining than any of the histories of the kings of the earth, to which (those of them that are of any certainty) it is prior in time; for though there were kings in Edom before there was any king in Israel, Gen 36:31 (foreigners, in that point of state, got the precedency), yet the history of the kings of Israel lives, and will live, in holy Writ, to the end of the world, whereas that of the kings of Edom is long since buried in oblivion; for the honour that comes from God is durable, while the honour of the world is like a mushroom, which comes up in a night and perishes in a night.—

The Bible began with the story of patriarchs, and prophets, and judges, men whose converse with heaven was more immediate, the record of which strengthens our faith, but is not so easily accommodated to our case, now that we expect not visions, as the subsequent history of affairs like ours under the direction of common providence; and here also we find, though not many types and figures of the Messiah, yet great expectations of him; for not only prophets, but kings, desired to see the great mysteries of the gospel, Luke 10:24-- The two books of Samuel are introductions to the books of the Kings, as they relate the origin of the royal government in Saul and of the royal family in David.

These two books give us an account of David's successor, Solomon, the division of his kingdom, and the succession of the several kings both of Judah and Israel, with an abstract of their history down to the captivity. And as from the book of Genesis we may collect excellent rules of economics, for the good governing of families, so from these books we may collect rules of politics, for the directing of public affairs. There is in these books special regard had to the house and lineage of David, from which Christ came. Some of his sons trod in his steps, and others did not.

The characters of the kings of Judah may be thus briefly given—

David	the devout,
Solomon	the wise
Rehoboam	the simple
Abijah	the valiant
Asa	the upright
Jehoshaphat	the religious
Jehoram	the wicked
Ahaziah	the profane
Joash	the backslider
Amaziah	the rash
Uzziah	the mighty
Jotham	the peaceable
Ahaz	the idolater
Hezekiah	the reformer

Manasseh	the penitent
Amon	the obscure
Josiah	the tender-hearted
Jehoahaz	
Jehoiakim,	
Jehoiachin,	
Zedekiah	all wicked

and such as brought ruin quickly on themselves and their kingdom. The number of the good and bad is nearly equal, but the reigns of the good were generally long and those of the bad short, the consideration of which will make the state of Israel not altogether so bad in this period as at first it seems. In this first book we have,

- I. The death of David, ch. 1 and 2.
- II. The glorious reign of Solomon, and his building the temple (ch. 3-10), but the cloud his sun set under, ch. 11.
- III. The division of the kingdoms in Rehoboam, and his reign and Jeroboam's, ch. 12-14.
- IV. The reigns of Abijah and Asa over Judah, Baasha and Omri over Israel, ch. 15 and 16.
- V. Elijah's miracles, ch. 17-19.
- VI. Ahab's success against Benhadad, his wickedness and fall, ch. 20-22. And in all this history it appears that kings, though gods to us, are men to God, mortal and accountable.

This second book of the Kings (which the Septuagint, numbering from Samuel, called the fourth) is a continuation of the former book; and, some think, might better have been made to begin with the fifty-first verse of the foregoing chapter, where the reign of Ahaziah begins. The former book had an illustrious beginning, in the glories of the kingdom of Israel, when it was entire; this has a melancholy conclusion, in the desolations of the kingdoms of Israel first, and then of Judah, after they had been long broken into two: for a kingdom divided against itself cometh to destruction. But, as Elijah's mighty works were very much the glory of the former book, towards the latter end of it, so were Elisha's the glory of this, towards the beginning of it. These prophets out-shone their princes; and therefore, as far as they go, the history shall be accounted for in them. Here is,

- I. Elijah fetching fire from heaven and ascending in fire to heaven, ch. 1 and 2.
- II. Elisha working many miracles, both for prince and people, Israelites and foreigners, ch. 3-7.
- III. Hazael and Jehu anointed, the former for the correction of Israel, the latter for the destruction of the house of Ahab and the worship of Baal, ch. 8-10.
- IV. The reign of several of the kings, both of Judah and Israel, ch. 11-16.
- V. The captivity of the ten tribes, ch. 17.
- VI. The good and glorious reign of Hezekiah, ch. 18-20.
- VII. Manassah's wicked reign, and Josiah's good one, ch. 21-23.
- VIII. The destruction of Jerusalem by the king of Babylon, ch. 24 and 25. This history, in the several passages of it, confirms that observation of Solomon, That righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is the reproach of any people.

Matthew Henry's Commentary

1 Chronicles

In common things repetition is thought needless and nauseous; but, in sacred things, precept must be upon precept and line upon line. To me, says the apostle, to write the same things is not grievous, but for you it is safe, Phil 3:1. These books of Chronicles are in a great measure repetition; so are much of the second and third of the four evangelists: and yet there are no tautologies either here or there no vain repetitions. We may be ready to think that of all the books of holy scripture we could best spare these two books of Chronicles. Perhaps we might, and yet we could ill spare them: for there are many most excellent useful things in them, which we find not elsewhere. And as for what we find here which we have already met with,

1. It might be of great use to those who lived when these books were first published, before the canon of the Old Testament was completed and the particles of it put together; for it would remind them of what was more fully related in the other books. Abstracts, abridgments, and references, are of use in divinity as well as law. That, perhaps, may not be said in vain which yet has been said before.
2. It is still of use, that out of the mouth of two witnesses every word may be established, and, being inculcated, may be remembered.

The penman of these books is supposed to be Ezra, that ready scribe in the law of the Lord, Ezra 7:6. It is a groundless story of that apocryphal writer (2 Esdr. 14:21, etc.) that, all the law being burnt, Ezra was divinely inspired to write it all over again, which yet might take rise from the books of Chronicles, where we find, though not all the same story repeated, yet the names of all those who were the subjects of that story. These books are called in the Hebrew words of days-- journals or annals, because, by divine direction, collected out of some public and authentic records. The collection was made after the captivity, and yet the language of the originals, written before, it sometimes retained, as 2 Chron 5:9, there it is unto this day, which must have been written before the destruction of the temple. The Septuagint calls it a book Paraleipomenon(NT:3844;NT:3007)-- of things left, or overlooked, by the preceding historians; and several such things there are in it. It is the re-reward, the gathering host, of this sacred camp, which gathers up what remained, that nothing might be lost. In this first book we have,

- I. A collection of sacred genealogies, from Adam to David: and they are none of those which the apostle calls endless genealogies, but have their use and end in Christ, ch. 1-9. Divers little passages of history are here inserted which we had not before.
- II. A repetition of the history of the translation of the kingdom from Saul to David, and of the triumph of David's reign, with large additions, ch. 10-21.
- III. An original account of the settlement David made of the ecclesiastical affairs, and the preparation he made for the building of the temple, ch. 22-29. These are words of days, of the oldest days, of the best days, of the Old-Testament church. The reigns of kings and dates of kingdoms, as well as the lives of common persons, are reckoned by days; for a little time often gives a great turn, and yet all time is nothing to eternity.

Matthew Henry's Commentary

2 Chronicles

This book begins with the reign of Solomon and the building of the temple, and continues the history of the kings of Judah thenceforward to the captivity and so concludes with the fall of that illustrious monarchy and the destruction of the temple. That monarchy of the house of David, as it was prior in time, so it was superior in worth and dignity to all those four celebrated ones of which Nebuchadnezzar dreamed. The Babylonian monarchy I reckon to begin in Nebuchadnezzar himself-- Thou art that head of gold, and that lasted but about seventy years; The Persian monarchy, in several families, about 130; the Grecian, in their several branches, about 300; and 300 more went far with the Roman. But as I reckon David a greater hero than any of the founders of those monarchies, and Solomon a more magnificent prince than any of those that were the glories of them, so the succession was kept up in a lineal descent throughout the whole monarchy, which continued considerable between 400 and 500 years, and, after a long eclipse, shone forth again in the kingdom of the Messiah, of the increase of whose government and peace there shall be no end. This history of the Jewish monarchy, as it is more authentic, so it is more entertaining and more instructive, than the histories of any of those monarchies.

We had the story of the house of David before, in the first and second books of Kings, intermixed with that of the kings of Israel, which there took more room than that of Judah; but here we have it entire. Much is repeated here which we had before, yet many of the passages of the story are enlarged upon, and divers added, which we had not before, especially relating to the affairs of religion; for it is a church-history, and it is written for our learning, to let nations and families know that then, and then only, they can expect to prosper, when they keep in the way of their duty to God: for all along the good kings prospered and the wicked kings suffered. The peaceable reign of Solomon we have (ch. 1-9), the blemished reign of Rehoboam (ch. 10-12), the short but busy reign of Abijah (ch. 13), the long and happy reign of Asa (ch. 14-16), the pious and prosperous reign of Jehoshaphat (ch. 17-20), the impious and infamous reigns of Jehoram and Ahaziah (ch. 21-22), the unsteady reigns of Joash and Amaziah (ch. 24, 25), the long and prosperous reign of Uzziah (ch. 26), the regular reign of Jotham (ch. 27), the profane and wicked reign of Ahaz (ch. 28), the gracious glorious reign of Hezekiah (ch. 29-32), the wicked reigns of Manasseh and Amon (ch. 33), the reforming reign of Josiah (ch. 34, 35), the ruining reigns of his sons (ch. 36). Put all these together, and the truth of that word of God will appear, Those that honour me I will honour, but those that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.

The learned Mr. Whiston, in his chronology, suggests that the historical books which were written after the captivity (namely, the two books of Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah) have more mistakes in names and numbers than all the books of the Old Testament besides, through the carelessness of transcribers: but, though that should be allowed, the things are so very minute that we may be confident the foundation of God stands sure notwithstanding.

The Era of the Kings

The Divided Kingdom The Kingdom of Israel

931-722 BC

Jeroboam I	931-910	1 Kings 12:20-14:20 2 Chronicles 10:2-13:20
	<i>ministry of Ahijah</i>	
Nadab	910-909	1 Kings 14:20-15:31
Baasha	909-886	1 Kings 15:16-16:7
<i>Ministry of Hanani</i>		
<i>Ministry of Jehu</i>		
Elah	886-885	1 Kings 16:8-14
Zimir	885	1 Kings 16:8-20
Omri	885-874	1 Kings 16:16-28
Samaria est.		
Ahab	874-853	1 Kings 16:28-22:40 2 Chronicles 18:1-34
<i>Ministry of Elijah</i>		
Ahaziah	853-852	1 Kings 22:40-2 Kings 1:1 2 Chronicles 20:35-37
Jehoram (Joram)	852-841	2 Kings 1:17-9:29 2 Chronicles 22:5-7
<i>Ministry of Elisha</i>		
<i>Ministry of Obadiah</i>		
<i>Jehu kills the kings Of Israel and Judah</i>		
Jehu	841-814	2 Kings 9:11-10:36 2 Chronicles 22:7-9
Jehoahaz	814-799	2 Kings 10:35-13:9
Joash (Jehoash)	799-782	2 Kings 13:9-14:16 2 Chronicles 25:17-25
Jeroboam II	782-743	2 Kings 13:13-14:29
<i>Ministry of prophecy</i>		
Zachariah (Zechariah)	743	2 Kings 14:29-15:12
Menahem	743-738	2 Kings 15:22-26
Pekahiah	738-737	2 Kings 15:25-31 2 Chronicles 28:6
Hosea	731-722	2 Kings 15:30-18:12
<i>Samaria falls and leading citizen are deported</i>		

Matthew Henry's Commentary

Ezra

The Jewish church puts on quite another face in this book from what it had appeared with; its state much better, and more pleasant, than it was of late in Babylon, and yet far inferior to what it had been formerly. The dry bones here live again, but in the form of a servant; the yoke of their captivity is taken off, but the marks of it in their galled necks remain. Kings we hear no more of; the crown has fallen from their heads. Prophets they are blessed with, to direct them in their re-establishment, but, after a while, prophecy ceases among them, till the great prophet appears, and his fore-runner. The history of this book is the accomplishment of Jeremiah's prophecy concerning the return of the Jews out of Babylon at the end of seventy years, and a type of the accomplishment of the prophecies of the Apocalypse concerning the deliverance of the gospel church out of the New-Testament Babylon. Ezra preserved the records of that great revolution and transmitted them to the church in this book. His name signifies a helper; and so he was to that people. A particular account concerning him we shall meet with, ch. 7, where he himself enters upon the stage of action. The book gives us an account,

- I. Of the Jews' return out of their captivity, ch. 1, 2.
- II. Of the building of the temple, the opposition it met with, and yet the perfecting of it at last, ch. 3-6.
- III. Of Ezra's coming to Jerusalem, ch. 7, 8.
- IV. Of the good service he did there, in obliging those that had married strange wives to put them away, ch. 9, 10.

This beginning again of the Jewish nation was small, yet its latter end greatly increased.

Matthew Henry's Commentary

Nehemiah

This book continues the history of the children of the captivity, the poor Jews, that had lately returned out of Babylon to their own land. At this time not only the Persian monarchy flourished in great pomp and power, but Greece and Rome began to be very great and to make a figure. Of the affairs of those high and mighty states we have authentic accounts extant; but the sacred and inspired history takes cognizance only of the state of the Jews, and makes no mention of other nations but as the Israel of God had dealings with them: for the Lord's portion is his people; they are his peculiar treasure, and, in comparison with them, the rest of the world is but as lumber. In my esteem, Ezra the scribe and Nehemiah the tirshatha, though neither of them ever wore a crown, commanded an army, conquered any country, or was famed for philosophy or oratory, yet both of them, being pious praying men, and very serviceable in their day to the church of God and the interests of religion, were really greater men and more honourable, not only than any of the Roman consuls or dictators, but than Xenophon, or Demosthenes, or Plato himself, who lived at the same time, the bright ornaments of Greece.

Nehemiah's agency for the advancing of the settlement of Israel we have a full account of in this book of his own commentaries or memoirs, wherein he records not only the works of his hands, but the workings of his heart, in the management of public affairs, inserting in the story many devout reflections and ejaculations, which discover in his mind a very deep tincture of serious piety and are peculiar to his writing. Twelve years, from his twentieth year Neh 1:1 to his thirty-second year Neh 13:6, he was governor of Judea, under Artaxerxes king of Persia, whom Dr. Lightfoot supposes to be the same Artaxerxes as Ezra has his commission from. This book relates,

- I. Nehemiah's concern for Jerusalem and the commission he obtained from the king to go thither, ch. 1, 2.
- II. His building the wall of Jerusalem notwithstanding the opposition he met with, ch. 3, 4.
- III. His redressing the grievances of the people, ch. 5.
- IV. His finishing the wall, ch. 6.
- V. The account he took of the people, ch. 7.
- VI. The religious solemnities of reading the law, fasting, and praying, and renewing their covenants, to which he called the people (ch. 8-10).
- VII. The care he took for the replenishing of the holy city and the settling of the holy tribe, ch. 11, 12.
- VIII. His zeal in reforming various abuses, ch. 13.

Some call this the second book of Ezra, not because he was the penman of it, but because it is a continuation of the history of the foregoing book, with which it is connected (v. 1). This was the last historical book that was written, as Malachi was the last prophetic book, of the Old Testament.

Matthew Henry's Commentary

Esther

How the providence of God watched over the Jews that had returned out of captivity to their own land, and what great and kind things were done for them, we read in the two foregoing books; but there were many who staid behind, having not zeal enough for God's house, and the holy land and city, to carry them through the difficulties of a removal thither. These, one would think, should have been excluded the special protection of Providence, as unworthy the name of Israelites; but our God deals not with us according to our folly and weakness.

We find in this book that even those Jews who were scattered in the provinces of the heathen were taken care of, as well as those who were gathered in the land of Judea, and were wonderfully preserved, when doomed to destruction and appointed as sheep for the slaughter. Who drew up this story is uncertain. Mordecai was as able as any man to relate, on his own knowledge, the several passages of it; quorum pars magna fuit-- for he bore a conspicuous part in it; and that he wrote such an account of them as was necessary to inform his people of the grounds of their observing the feast of Purim we are told (Est 9:20, Mordecai wrote these things, and sent them enclosed in letters to all the Jews), and therefore we have reason to think he was the penman of the whole book.

It is the narrative of a plot laid against the Jews to cut them all off, and which was wonderfully disappointed by a concurrence of providences. The most compendious exposition of it will be to read it deliberately all together at one time, for the latter events expound the former and show what providence intended in them. The name of God is not found in this book; but the apocryphal addition to it (which is not in the Hebrew, nor was ever received by the Jews into the canon), containing six chapters, begins thus, Then Mordecai said, God has done these things. But, though the name of God be not in it, the finger of God is, directing many minute events for the bringing about of his people's deliverance. The particulars are not only surprising and very entertaining, but edifying and very encouraging to the faith and hope of God's people in the most difficult and dangerous times. We cannot now expect such miracles to be wrought for us as were for Israel when they were brought out of Egypt, but we may expect that in such ways as God here took to defeat Haman's plot he will still protect his people. We are told,

- I. How Esther came to be queen and Mordecai to be great at court, who were to be the instruments of the intended deliverance, ch. 1, 2.
- II. Upon what provocation, and by what arts, Haman the Amalekite obtained an order for the destruction of all the Jews, ch. 3.
- III. The great distress the Jews, and their patriots especially, were in thereupon, ch. 4.
- IV. The defeating of Haman's particular plot against Mordecai's life, ch. 5-7.
- V. The defeating of his general plot against the Jews, ch. 8.
- VI. The care that was taken to perpetuate the remembrance of this, ch. 9, 10.

The whole story confirms the Psalmist's observation Ps 37:12-13, The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth. The Lord shall laugh at him; he sees that his day is coming.

Matthew Henry's Commentary

Job

This book of Job stands by itself, is not connected with any other, and is therefore to be considered alone. Many copies of the Hebrew Bible place it after the book of Psalms, and some after the Proverbs, which perhaps has given occasion to some learned men to imagine it to have been written by Isaiah or some of the later prophets. But, as the subject appears to have been much more ancient, so we have no reason to think but that the composition of the book was, and that therefore it is most fitly placed first in this collection of divine morals: also, being doctrinal, it is proper to precede and introduce the book of Psalms, which is devotional, and the book of Proverbs, which is practical; for how shall we worship or obey a God whom we know not? As to this book,

I. We are sure that it is given by inspiration of God, though we are not certain who was the penman of it. The Jews, though no friends to Job, because he was a stranger to the commonwealth of Israel, yet, as faithful conservators of the oracles of God committed to them, always retained this book in their sacred canon. The history is referred to by one apostle James 5:11 and one passage Job 5:13 is quoted by another apostle, with the usual form of quoting scripture, It is written, 1 Cor 3:19. It is the opinion of many of the ancients that this history was written by Moses himself in Midian, and delivered to his suffering brethren in Egypt, for their support and comfort under their burdens, and the encouragement of their hope that God would in due time deliver and enrich them, as he did this patient sufferer. Some conjecture that it was written originally in Arabic, and afterwards translated into Hebrew, for the use of the Jewish church, by Solomon (so Monsieur Jurieu) or some other inspired writer. It seems most probable to me that Elihu was the penman of it, at least of the discourses, because Job 32:15-16 he mingles the words of a historian with those of a disputant: but Moses perhaps wrote the first two chapters and the last, to give light to the discourses; for in them God is frequently called Jehovah, but not once in all the discourses, except Job 12:9. That name was but little known to the patriarchs before Moses, Ex 6:3. If Job wrote it himself, some of the Jewish writers themselves own him a prophet among the Gentiles; if Elihu, we find he had a spirit of prophecy which filled him with matter and constrained him, Job 32:18.

II. We are sure that it is, for the substance of it, a true history, and not a romance, though the dialogues are poetical. No doubt there was such a man as Job; the prophet Ezekiel names him with Noah and Dan; Ezek 14:14. The narrative we have here of his prosperity and piety, his strange afflictions and exemplary patience, the substance of his conferences with his friends, and God's discourse with him out of the whirlwind, with his return at length to a very prosperous condition, no doubt is exactly true, though the inspired penman is allowed the usual liberty of putting the matter of which Job and his friends discoursed into his own words.

III. We are sure that it is very ancient, though we cannot fix the precise time either when Job lived or when the book was written. So many, so evident, are its hoary hairs, the marks of its antiquity, that we have reason to think it of equal date with the book of Genesis itself, and that holy Job was contemporary with Isaac and Jacob; though not coheir with them of the promise of the earthly Canaan, yet a joint-expectant with them of the better country, that is, the heavenly. Probably he was of the posterity of Nahor, Abraham's brother, whose first-born was Uz Gen 22:21, and in whose family religion was for some ages kept up, as appears, Gen 31:53, where God is called, not only the God of Abraham, but the God of Nahor.

IV. He lived before the age of man was shortened to seventy or eighty, as it was in Moses's time, before sacrifices were confined to one altar, before the general apostasy of the nations from the knowledge and worship of the true God, and while yet there was no other idolatry known than the worship of the sun and moon, and that punished by the Judge; Job 31:26-28. He lived while God was known by the name of God Almighty more than by the name of Jehovah; for he is called Shaddai(OT:7706)-- the Almighty, above thirty times in this book. He lived while divine knowledge was conveyed, not by writing, but by tradition; for to that appeals are here made, Job 8:8; 21:29; 15:18; 5:1. And we have therefore reason to think that he lived before Moses, because here is no mention at all of the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt, or the giving of the law. There is indeed one passage which might be made to allude to the drowning of Pharaoh Job 26:12: He divideth the sea with his power, and by his understanding he smiteth through Rahab, which name Egypt is frequently called by in scripture, as Ps 87:4; 89:10; Isa 51:9. But that may as well refer to the proud waves of the sea. We conclude therefore that we are here got back to the patriarchal age, and, besides its authority, we receive this book with veneration for its antiquity.

V. We are sure that it is of great use to the church, and to every good Christian, though there are many passages in it dark and hard to be understood. We cannot perhaps be confident of the true meaning of every Arabic word and phrase we meet with in it. It is a book that finds a great deal of work for the critics; but enough is plain to make the whole profitable, and it was all written for our learning.

1. This noble poem presents to us, in very clear and lively characters, these five things among others—

(1) A monument of primitive theology. The first and great principles of the light of nature, on which natural religion is founded, are here, in a warm, and long, and learned dispute, not only taken for granted on all sides and not the least doubt made of them, but by common consent plainly laid down as eternal truths, illustrated and urged as affecting commanding truths. Were ever the being of God, his glorious attributes and perfections, his unsearchable wisdom, his irresistible power, his inconceivable glory, his inflexible justice, and his incontestable sovereignty, discoursed of with more clearness, fulness, reverence, and divine eloquence, than in this book?

The creation of the world, and the government of it, are here admirably described, not as matters of nice speculation, but as laying most powerful obligations upon us to fear and serve, to submit to and trust in, our Creator, owner, Lord, and ruler. Moral good and evil, virtue and vice, were never drawn more to the life (the beauty of the one and the deformity of the other) than in this book; nor the inviolable rule of God's judgment more plainly laid down, That happy are the righteous, it shall be well with them; and Woe to the wicked, it shall be ill with them. These are not questions of the schools to keep the learned world in action, nor engines of state to keep the unlearned world in awe; no, it appears by this book that they are sacred truths of undoubted certainty, and which all the wise and sober part of mankind have in every age subscribed and submitted to.

- (2) It presents us with a specimen of Gentile piety. This great saint descended probably not from Abraham, but Nahor; or, if from Abraham, not from Isaac, but from one of the sons of the concubines that were sent into the east-country Gen 25:6; or, if from Isaac, yet not from Jacob, but Esau; so that he was out of the pale of the covenant of peculiarity, no Israelite, no proselyte, and yet none like him for religion, nor such a favourite of heaven upon this earth. It was a truth therefore, before St. Peter perceived it, that in every nation he that fears God and works righteousness is accepted of him, Acts 10:35. There were children of God scattered abroad John 11:52 besides the incorporated children of the kingdom, Matt 8:11-12.
- (3) It presents us with an exposition of the book of Providence, and a clear and satisfactory solution of many of the difficult and obscure passages of it. The prosperity of the wicked and the afflictions of the righteous have always been reckoned two as hard chapters as any in that book; but they are here expounded, and reconciled with the divine wisdom, purity, and goodness, by the end of these things.
- (4) It presents us with a great example of patience and close adherence to God in the midst of the sorest calamities. Sir Richard Blackmore's most ingenious pen, in his excellent preface to his paraphrase on this book, makes Job a hero proper for an epic poem; for, says he, "He appears brave in distress and valiant in affliction, maintains his virtue, and with that his character, under the most exasperating provocations that the malice of hell could invent, and thereby gives a most noble example of passive fortitude, a character no way inferior to that of the active hero," etc.
- (5) It presents us with an illustrious type of Christ, the particulars of which we shall endeavour to take notice of as we go along.

In general, Job was a great sufferer, was emptied and humbled, but in order to his greater glory. So Christ abased himself, that we might be exalted. The learned bishop Patrick quotes St. Jerome ore than once speaking of Job as a type of Christ, who for the job that was set before him endured the cross, who was persecuted, for a time, by men and devils, and seemed forsaken of God too, but was raised to be an intercessor even for his friends and had added affliction to his misery. When the apostle speaks of the patience of Job he immediately takes notice of the end of the Lord, that is, of the Lord Jesus (as some understand it), typified by Job, James 5:11.

2. In this book we have,

- (1) The history of Job's sufferings, and his patience under them (ch. 1, 2), not without a mixture of human frailty, ch. 3.
- (2) A dispute between him and his friends upon them, in which,
 - [1.] The opponents were Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar.
 - [2.] The respondent was Job.

[3.] The moderators were, First, Elihu, ch. 32-37. Secondly, God himself, ch. 38-41.

(3.) The issue of all in Job's honour and prosperity, ch. 42. Upon the whole, we learn that many are the afflictions of the righteous, but that when the Lord delivers them out of them all the trial of their faith will be found to praise, and honour, and glory.

Matthew Henry's Commentary

Psalms

We have now before us one of the choicest and most excellent parts of all the Old Testament; nay, so much is there in it of Christ and his gospel, as well as of God and his law, that it had been called the abstract, or summary, of both Testaments. The History of Israel, which we were long upon, let us to camps and council-boards, and there entertained and instructed us in the knowledge of God. The book of Job brought us into the schools, and treated us with profitable disputations concerning God and his providence. But this book brings us into the sanctuary, draws us off from converse with men, with the politicians, philosophers, or disputers of this world, and directs us into communion with God, by solacing and reposing our souls in him, lifting up and letting out our hearts towards him. Thus may we be in the mount with God; and we understand not our interests if we say not, It is good to be here. Let us consider, I. **The title of this book.** It is called,

1. The Psalms; under that title it is referred to, Luke 24:44. The Hebrew calls it Tehillim,(OT:8416) which properly signifies Psalms of praise, because many of them are such; but Psalms is a more general word, meaning all metrical compositions fitted to be sung, which may as well be historical, doctrinal, or supplicatory, as laudatory. Though singing be properly the voice of joy, yet the intention of songs is of a much greater latitude, to assist the memory, and both to express and to excite all the other affections as well as this of joy. The priests had a mournful muse as well as joyful ones; and the divine institution of singing psalms is thus largely intended; for we are directed not only to praise God, but to teach and admonish ourselves and one another in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, Col 3:16.

2. It is called the Book of Psalms; so it is quoted by St. Peter, Acts 1:20. It is a collection of psalms, of all the psalms that were divinely inspired, which, though composed at several times and upon several occasions, are here put together without any reference to or dependence upon one another; thus they were preserved from being scattered and lost, and were in so much greater readiness for the service of the church. See what a good master we serve, and what pleasantness there is in wisdom's ways, when we are not only commanded to sing at our work, and have cause enough given us to do so, but have words also put in our mouths and songs prepared to our hands.

II. The author of this book.

It is, no doubt, derived originally from the blessed Spirit. They are spiritual songs, words which the Holy Ghost taught. The penman of most of them was David the son of Jesse, who is therefore called the sweet psalmist of Israel, 2 Sam 23:1. Some that have not his name in their titles yet are expressly ascribed to him elsewhere, as Ps 2 (Acts 4:25) and Ps 96 and 105 (1 Chron 16). One psalm is expressly said to be the prayer of Moses (Ps 90); and that some of the psalms were penned by Asaph is intimated, 2 Chron 29:30, where they are said to praise the Lord in the words of David and Asaph, who is there called a seer or prophet. Some of the psalms seem to have been penned long after, as Ps 137, at the time of the captivity in Babylon; but the far greater part of them were certainly penned by David himself, whose genius lay towards poetry and music, and who was raised up, qualified, and animated, for the establishing of the ordinance of singing psalms in the church of God, as Moses and Aaron were, in their day, for the settling of the ordinances of sacrifice; theirs is superseded, but his remains, and will to the end of time, when it shall be swallowed up in the songs of eternity. Herein David was a type of Christ, who descended from him, not from Moses, because he came to take away sacrifice (the family of

Moses was soon lost and extinct), but to establish and perpetuate joy and praise; for of the family of David in Christ there shall be no end.

III. The scope of it. It is manifestly intended,

1. To assist the exercises of natural religion, and to kindle in the souls of men those devout affections which we owe to God as our Creator, owner, ruler, and benefactor. The book of Job helps to prove our first principles of the divine perfections and providence; but this helps to improve them in prayers and praises, and professions of desire towards him, dependence on him, and an entire devotedness and resignation to him. Other parts of scripture show that God is infinitely above man, and his sovereign Lord; but this shows us that he may, notwithstanding, be conversed with by us sinful worms of the earth; and there are ways in which, if it be not our own fault, we may keep up communion with him in all the various conditions of human life.

2. To advance the excellencies of revealed religion, and in the most pleasing powerful manner to recommend it to the world. There is indeed little or nothing of the ceremonial law in all the book of Psalms. Though sacrifice and offering were yet to continue many ages, yet they are here represented as things which God did not desire Ps 40:6, 51:16, as things comparatively little, and which in time were to vanish away. But the word and law of God, those parts of it which are moral and of perpetual obligation are here all along magnified and made honourable, nowhere more. And Christ, the crown and centre of revealed religion, the foundation, corner, and top-stone, of that blessed building, is here clearly spoken of in type and prophecy, his sufferings and the glory that should follow, and the kingdom that he should set up in the world, in which God's covenant with David, concerning his kingdom, was to have its accomplishment. What a high value does this book put upon the word of God, his statutes and judgments, his covenant and the great and precious promises of it; and how does it recommend them to us as our guide and stay, and our heritage for ever!

IV. The use of it.

All scripture, being given by inspiration of God, is profitable to convey divine light into our understandings; but this book is of singular use with that to convey divine life and power, and a holy warmth, into our affections. There is no one book of scripture that is more helpful to the devotions of the saints than this, and it has been so in all ages of the church, ever since it was written and the several parts of it were delivered to the chief musician for the service of the church.

1. It is of use to be sung. Further than David's psalms we may go, but we need not, for hymns and spiritual songs. What the rules of the Hebrew metre were even the learned are not certain. But these psalms ought to be rendered according to the metre of every language, at least so as that they may be sung for the edification of the church. And methinks it is a great comfort to us, when we are singing David's psalms, that we are offering the very same praises to God that were offered to him in the days of David and the other godly kings of Judah. So rich, so well made, are these divine poems, that they can never be exhausted, can never be worn thread-bare.

2. It is of use to be read and opened by the ministers of Christ, as containing great and excellent truths, and rules concerning good and evil. Our Lord Jesus expounded the psalms to his disciples, the gospel psalms, and opened their understandings (for he had the key of David) to

understand them, Luke 24:44. 3. It is of use to be read and meditated upon by all good people. It is a full fountain, out of which we may all be drawing water with joy.

- (1) The Psalmist's experiences are of great use for our direction, caution, and encouragement. In telling us, as he often does, what passed between God and his soul, he lets us know what we may expect from God, and what he will expect, and require, and graciously accept, from us. David was a man after God's own heart, and therefore those who find themselves in some measure according to his heart have reason to hope that they are renewed by the grace of God, after the image of God, and many have much comfort in the testimony of their consciences for them that they can heartily say Amen to David's prayers and praises.
- (2) Even the Psalmist's expressions too are of great use; and by them the Spirit helps our praying infirmities, because we know not what to pray for as we ought. In all our approaches to God, as well as in our first returns to God, we are directed to take with us words Hos 14:2, these word, words which the Holy Ghost teaches. If we make David's psalms familiar to us, as we ought to do, whatever errand we have at the throne of grace, by way of confession, petition, or thanksgiving, we may thence be assisted in the delivery of it; whatever devout affection is working in us, holy desire or hope, sorrow or joy, we may there find apt words wherewith to clothe it, sound speech which cannot be condemned. It will be good to collect the most proper and lively expressions of devotion which we find here, and to methodize them, and reduce them to the several heads of prayer, that they may be the more ready to us.

Or we may take sometimes one choice psalm and sometimes another, and pray it over, that is, enlarge upon each verse in our own thoughts, and offer up our meditations to God as they arise from the expressions we find there. The learned Dr. Hammond, in his preface to his paraphrase on the Psalms (sect. 29), says, "That going over a few psalms with these interpunctions of mental devotion, suggested, animated, and maintained, by the native life and vigour which is in the psalms, is much to be preferred before the saying over the whole Psalter, since nothing is more fit to be averted in religious offices than their degenerating into heartless dispirited recitations." If, as St. Austin advises, we form our spirit by the affection of the psalm, we may then be sure of acceptance with God in using the language of it. Nor is it only our devotion, and the affections of our mind, that the book of Psalms assists, teaching us how to offer praise so as to glorify God, but, it is also a directory to the actions of our lives, and teaches us how to order our conversation aright, so as that, in the end, we may see the salvation of God, Ps. 1:23. The Psalms were thus serviceable to the Old-Testament church, but to us Christians they may be of more use than they could be to those who lived before the coming of Christ; for, as Moses's sacrifices, so David's songs, are expounded and made more intelligible by the gospel of Christ, which lets us within the veil; so that if to David's prayers and praises we all St. Paul's prayers in his epistles, and the new songs in the Revelation, we shall be thoroughly furnished for this good work; for the scripture, perfected, makes the man of God perfect.

As to the division of this book, we need not be solicitous; there is no connexion (or very seldom) between one psalm and another, nor any reason discernable for the placing of them in the order wherein we here find them; but it seems to be ancient, for that which is now the second psalm was so in the apostles' time, Acts 13:33. The vulgar Latin joins the 9th and 10th together;

all popish authors quote by that, so that, thenceforward, throughout the book, their number is one short of ours; our 11 is their 10, our 119 is their 118. But they divide the 147th into two, and so make up the number of 150. Some have endeavoured to reduce the psalms to proper heads, according to the matter of them, but there is often such a variety of matter in one and the same psalm that this cannot be done with any certainty. But the seven penitential Psalms have been in a particular manner singled out by the devotions of many. They are reckoned to be Ps 6; 32; 38; 51; 102; 130, and 143. The Psalms were divided into five books, each concluding with Amen, Amen, or Hallelujah; the first ending with Ps 41, the second with Ps 72, the third with Ps 89, the fourth with Ps 106, the fifth with Ps. Others divide them into three fifties; others into sixty parts, two for every day of the month, one for the morning, the other for the evening. Let good Christians divide them for themselves, so as may best increase their acquaintance with them, that they may have them at hand upon all occasions and may sing them in the spirit and with the understanding.

Matthew Henry's Commentary

Proverbs

We have now before us,

I. A new author, or penman rather, or pen (if you will) made use of by the Holy Ghost for making known the mind of God to us, writing as moved by the finger of God (so the Spirit of God is called), and that is Solomon; through his hand came this book of Scripture and the two that follow it, Ecclesiastes and Canticles, a sermon and a song. Some think he wrote Canticles when he was very young, Proverbs in the midst of his days, and Ecclesiastes when he was old. In the title of his song he only writes himself Solomon, perhaps because he wrote it before his accession to the throne, being filled with the Holy Ghost when he was young. In the title of his Proverbs he writes himself the son of David, king of Israel, for then he ruled over all Israel. In the title of his Ecclesiastes he writes himself the son of David, king of Jerusalem, because then perhaps his influence had grown less upon the distant tribes, and he confined himself very much in Jerusalem. Concerning this author we may observe,

1. That he was a king, and a king's son.

The penmen of scripture, hitherto, were most of them men of the first rank in the world, as Moses and Joshua, Samuel and David, and now Solomon; but, after him, the inspired writers were generally poor prophets, men of no figure in the world, because that dispensation was approaching in the which God would choose the weak and foolish things of the world to confound the wise and mighty and the poor should be employed to evangelize. Solomon was a very rich king, and his dominions were very large, a king of the first magnitude, and yet he addicted himself to the study of divine things, and was a prophet and a prophet's son. It is no disparagement to the greatest princes and potentates in the world to instruct those about them in religion and the laws of it.

2. That he was one whom God endued with extraordinary measures of wisdom and knowledge, in answer to his prayers at his accession to the throne. His prayer was exemplary: Give me a wise and an understanding heart; the answer to it was encouraging: he had what he desired and all other things were added to him.

Now here we find what good use he made of the wisdom God gave him; he not only governed himself and his kingdom with it, but he gave rules of wisdom to others also, and transmitted them to posterity. Thus must we trade with the talents with which we are entrusted, according as they are.

3. That he was one who had his faults, and in his latter end turned aside from those good ways of God which in this book he had directed others in. We have the story of it 1 Kings 11, and a sad story it is, that the penman of such a book as this should apostatize as he did. Tell it not in Gath. But let those who are most eminently useful take warning by this not to be proud or secure; and let us all learn not to think the worse of good instructions though we have them from those who do not themselves altogether live up to them.

II. A new way of writing, in which divine wisdom is taught us by Proverbs, or short sentences, which contain their whole design within themselves and are not connected with one another. We have had divine laws, histories, and songs, and how divine proverbs; such various methods has Infinite Wisdom used for our instruction, that, no stone being left unturned to do us good, we may be inexcusable if we perish in our folly. Teaching by proverbs was,

1. An ancient way of teaching.

It was the most ancient way among the Greeks; each of the seven wise men of Greece had some one saying that he valued himself upon, and that made him famous. These sentences were inscribed on pillars, and had in great veneration as that which was said to come down from heaven. A coelo descendit, Gnothi seauton-- Know thyself is a precept which came down from heaven.

2. It was a plain and easy way of teaching, which cost neither the teachers nor the learners much pains, nor put their understandings nor their memories to the stretch. Long periods, and arguments far-fetched, must be laboured both by him that frames them and by him that would understand them, while a proverb, which carries both its sense and its evidence in a little compass, is quickly apprehended and subscribed to, and is easily retained. Both David's devotions and Solomon's instructions are sententious, which may recommend that way of expression to those who minister about holy things, both in praying and preaching.

3. It was a very profitable way of teaching, and served admirably well to answer the end. The word Mashal,(OT:4911) here used for a proverb, comes from a word that signifies to rule or have dominion, because of the commanding power and influence which wise and weighty sayings have upon the children of men; he that teaches by them dominatur in concionibus-- rules his auditory. It is easy to observe how the world is governed by proverbs. As saith the proverb of the ancients 1 Sam 24:13, or (as we commonly express it) As the old saying is, goes very far with most men in forming their notions and fixing their resolves. Much of the wisdom of the ancients has been handed down to posterity by proverbs; and some think we may judge of the temper and character of a nation by the complexion of its vulgar proverbs. Proverbs in conversation are like axioms in philosophy, maxims in law, and postulata in the mathematics, which nobody disputes, but every one endeavours to expound so as to have them on his side.

Yet there are many corrupt proverbs, which tend to debauch men's minds and harden them in sin. The devil has his proverbs, and the world and the flesh have their proverbs, which reflect reproach on God and religion (as Ezek 12:22; 18:2), to guard us against the corrupt influences of which God has his proverbs, which are all wise and good, and tend to make us so. These proverbs of Solomon were not merely a collection of the wise sayings that had been formerly delivered, as some have imagined, but were the dictates of the Spirit of God in Solomon. The very first of them Prov 1:7 agrees with what God said to man in the beginning (Job 28:28, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom); so that though Solomon was great, and his name may serve as much as any man's to recommend his writings, yet, behold, a greater than Solomon is here. It is God, by Solomon, that here speaks to us: I say, to us; for these proverbs were written for our learning, and, when Solomon speaks to his son, the exhortation is said to speak to us as unto children, Heb 12:5. And, as we have no book so useful to us in our devotions as David's psalms, so have we none so serviceable to us, for the right ordering of our conversations, as Solomon's proverbs, which as David says of the commandments, are exceedingly broad, containing, in a little compass, a complete body of divine ethics, politics, and economics, exposing every vice, recommending every virtue, and suggesting rules for the government of ourselves in every relation and condition, and every turn of the conversation. The learned bishop Hall has drawn up a system of moral philosophy out of Solomon's Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. The first nine chapters of this book are reckoned as a preface, by way of exhortation

to the study and practice of wisdom's rules, and caution against those things that would hinder therein. We have then the first volume of Solomon's proverbs (ch. 10-24); after that a second volume (ch. 25-29); and then Agur's prophecy (ch. 30), and Lemuel's (ch. 31). The scope of all is one and the same, to direct us so to order our conversation aright as that in the end we may see the salvation of the Lord. The best comment on these rules is to be ruled by them.

Matthew Henry's Commentary

Ecclesiastes

We are still among Solomon's happy men, his happy servants, that stood continually before him to hear his wisdom; and they are the choicest of all the dictates of his wisdom, such as were more immediately given by divine inspiration, that are here transmitted to us, not to be heard, as by them, but once, and then liable to be mistaken or forgotten, and by repetition to lose their beauty, but to be read, reviewed, revolved, and had in everlasting remembrance. The account we have of Solomon's apostasy from God, in the latter end of his reign 1 Kings 11:1, is the tragical part of his story; we may suppose that he spoke his Proverbs in the prime of his time, while he kept his integrity, but delivered his Ecclesiastes when he had grown old (for of the burdens and decays of age he speaks feelingly ch. 12), and was, by the grace of God, recovered from his backslidings. There he dictated his observations; here he wrote his own experiences; this is what days speak, and wisdom which the multitude of years teaches. The title of the book and the penman we shall meet with in the first verse, and therefore shall here only observe,

I. That it is a sermon, a sermon in print; the text is Eccl 1:2, Vanity of vanities, all is vanity; that is the doctrine too; it is proved at large by many arguments and an induction of particulars, and divers objections are answered, and in the close we have the use and application of all, by way of exhortation, to remember our Creator, to fear him, and to keep his commandments.

There are indeed many things in this book which are dark and hard to be understood, and some things which men of corrupt minds wrest to their own destruction, for want of distinguishing between Solomon's arguments and the objections of atheists and epicures; but there is enough easy and plain to convince us (if we will admit the conviction) of the vanity of the world, and its utter insufficiency to make us happy, the vileness of sin, and its certain tendency to make us miserable, and of the wisdom of being religious, and the solid comfort and satisfaction that are to be had in doing our duty both to God and man. This should be intended in every sermon, and that is a good sermon by which these points are in any measure gained.

II. That it is a penitential sermon, as some of David's psalms are penitential psalms; it is a recantation-sermon, in which the preacher sadly laments his own folly and mistake, in promising himself satisfaction in the things of this world, and even in the forbidden pleasures of sense, which now he finds more bitter than death.

III. His fall is a proof of the weakness of man's nature: Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, nor say, "I shall never be such a fool as to do so and so," when Solomon himself, the wisest of men, played the fool so egregiously; nor let the rich man glory in his riches, since Solomon's wealth was so great a snare to him, and did him a great deal more hurt than Job's poverty did him. His recovery is a proof of the power of God's grace, in bringing one back to God that has gone so far from him; it is a proof too of the riches of God's mercy in accepting him notwithstanding the many aggravations of his sin, pursuant to the promise made to David, that if his children should commit iniquity they should be corrected, but not abandoned and disinherited, 2 Sam 7:14-15. Let him therefore that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall; and let him that has fallen make haste to get up again, and not despair either of assistance or acceptance therein.

IV. That it is a practical profitable sermon. Solomon, being brought to repentance, resolves, like his father, to teach transgressors God's way Ps 51:13 and to give warning to all to take heed of splitting upon those rocks which had been fatal to him; and these were fruits meet for repentance.

The fundamental error of the children of men, and that which is at the bottom of all their departures from God, is the same with that of our first parents, hoping to be as gods by entertaining themselves with that which seems good for food, pleasant to the eyes, and desirable to make one wise. Now the scope of this book is to show that this is a great mistake, that our happiness consists not in being as gods to ourselves, to have what we will and do what we will, but in having him that made us to be a God to us. The moral philosophers disputed much about man's felicity, or chief good. Various opinions they had about it; but Solomon, in this book, determines the question, and assures us that to fear God and to keep his commandments is the whole of man. He tried what satisfaction might be found in the wealth of the world and the pleasures of sense, and at last pronounced all vanity and vexation; yet multitudes will not take his word, but will make the same dangerous experiment, and it proves fatal to them. He,

1. Shows the vanity of those things in which men commonly look for happiness, as human learning and policy, sensual delight, honour and power, riches and great possessions. And then,

2. He prescribes remedies against the vexation of spirit that attends them. Though we cannot cure them of their vanity, we may prevent the trouble they give us, by sitting loose to them, enjoying them comfortable, but laying our expectations low from them, and acquiescing in the will of God concerning us in every event, especially by remembering God in the days of our youth, and continuing in his fear and service all our days, with an eye to the judgment to come.

Matthew Henry's Commentary

Song of Solomon

All scripture, we are sure, is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for the support and advancement of the interests of his kingdom among men, and it is never the less so for there being found in it some things dark and hard to be understood, which those that are unlearned and unstable wrest to their own destruction. In our belief both of the divine extraction and of the spiritual exposition of this book we are confirmed by the ancient, constant, and concurring testimony both of the church of the Jews, to whom were committed the oracles of God, and who never made any doubt of the authority of this book, and of the Christian church, which happily succeeds them in that trust and honour.

I. It must be confessed, on the one hand, that if he who barely reads this book be asked, as the eunuch was Understandest thou what thou readest? he will have more reason than he had to say, How can I, except some man shall guide me? The books of scripture-history and prophecy are very much like one another, but this Song of Solomon's is very much unlike the songs of his father David; here is not the name of God in it; it is never quoted in the New Testament; we find not in it any expressions of natural religion or pious devotion, no, nor is it introduced by vision, or any of the marks of immediate revelation. It seems as hard as any part of scripture to be made a savour of life unto life, nay, and to those who come to the reading of it with carnal minds and corrupt affections, it is in danger of being made a savour of death unto death; it is a flower out of which they extract poison; and therefore the Jewish doctors advised their young people not to read it till they were thirty years old, lest by the abuse of that which is most pure and sacred (*horrendum dictu--* horrible to say!) the flames of lust should be kindled with fire from heaven, which is intended for the altar only. But,

II. It must be confessed, on the other hand, that with the help of the many faithful guides we have for the understanding of this book it appears to be a very bright and powerful ray of heavenly light, admirable fitted to excite pious and devout affections in holy souls, to draw out their desires towards God, to increase their delight in him, and improve their acquaintance and communion with him.

It is an allegory, the letter of which kills those who rest in that and look no further, but the spirit of which gives life, 2 Cor 3:6; John 6:63. It is a parable, which makes divine things more difficult to those who do not love them, but more plain and pleasant to those who do, Matt 13:14,16. Experienced Christians here find a counterpart of their experiences, and to them it is intelligible, while those neither understand it nor relish it who have no part nor lot in the matter. It is a son, an Epithalamium, or nuptial song, wherein, by the expressions of love between a bridegroom and his bride, are set forth and illustrated the mutual affections that pass between God and a distinguished remnant of mankind. It is a pastoral; the bride and bridegroom, for the more lively representation of humility and innocence, are brought in as a shepherd and his shepherdess. Now,

1. This song might easily be taken in a spiritual sense by the Jewish church, for whose use it was first composed, and was so taken, as appears by the Chaldee-Paraphrase and the most ancient Jewish expositors. God betrothed the people of Israel to himself; he entered into covenant with them, and it was a marriage-covenant. He had given abundant proofs of his love to

them, and required of them that they should love him with all their heart and soul. Idolatry was often spoken of as spiritual adultery, and doting upon idols, to prevent which this song was penned, representing the complacency which God took in Israel and which Israel ought to take in God, and encouraging them to continue faithful to him, though he might seem sometimes to withdraw and hide himself from them, and to wait for the further manifestation of himself in the promised Messiah.

2. It may more easily be taken in a spiritual sense by the Christian church, because the condescensions and communications of divine love appear more rich and free under the gospel than they did under the law, and the communion between heaven and earth more familiar. God sometimes spoke of himself as the husband of the Jewish church Isa 64:5; Hos 2:16,19, and rejoiced in it as his bride, Isa 62:4-5. But more frequently is Christ represented as the bridegroom of his church Matt 25:1; Rom 7:4; 2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:32, and the church as the bride, the Lamb's wife, Rev 19:7; 21:2,9. Pursuant to this metaphor Christ and the church in general, Christ and particular believers, are here discoursing with abundance of mutual esteem and endearment. The best key to this book is the 45th Psalm, which we find applied to Christ in the New Testament, and therefore this ought to be so too. It requires some pains to find out what may, probably, be the meaning of the Holy Spirit in the several parts of this book; as David's songs are many of them level to the capacity of the meanest, and there are shallows in them learned, and there are depths in it in which an elephant may swim. But, when the meaning is found out, it will be of admirable use to excite pious and devout affections in us; and the same truths which are plainly laid down in other scriptures when they are extracted out of this come to the soul with a more pleasing power. When we apply ourselves to the study of this book we must not only, with Moses and Joshua, put off our shoe from off our foot, and even forget that we have bodies, because the place where we stand is holy ground, but we must, with John, come up hither, must spread our wings, take a noble flight, and soar upwards, till by faith and holy love we enter into the holiest, for this is no other than the house of God and this is the gate of heaven.

Matthew Henry's Commentary

Isaiah

Prophet is a title that sounds very great to those that understand it, though, in the eye of the world, many of those that were dignified with it appeared very mean. A prophet is one that has a great intimacy with Heaven and a great interest there, and consequently a commanding authority upon earth. Prophecy is put for all divine revelation 2 Peter 1:20-21, because that was most commonly by dreams, voices, or visions, communicated to prophets first, and by them to the children of men, Num 12:6. Once indeed God himself spoke to all the thousands of Israel from the top of Mount Sinai; but the effect was so intolerably dreadful that they entreated God would for the future speak to them as he had done before, by men like themselves, whose terror should not make them afraid, nor their hands be heavy upon them, Job 33:7. God approved the motion (they have well said, says he, Deut 5:27-28), and the matter was then settled by consent of parties, that we must never expect to hear from God any more in that way, but by prophets, who received their instructions immediately from God, with a charge to deliver them to his church.

Before the sacred canon of the Old Testament began to be written there were prophets, who were instead of Bibles to the church. Our Saviour seems to reckon Abel among the prophets, Matt 23:31,35. Enoch was a prophet; and by him that was first in prediction which is to be last in execution-- the judgment of the great day. Jude 14, Behold, the Lord comes with his holy myriads. Noah was a preacher of righteousness. God said of Abraham, He is a prophet, Gen 20:7. Jacob foretold things to come, Gen 49:1. Nay, all the patriarchs are called prophets. Ps 105:15, Do my prophets no harm. Moses was, beyond all comparison, the most illustrious of all the Old-Testament prophets, for with him the Lord spoke face to face, Deut 34:10. He was the first writing prophet, and by his hand the first foundations of holy writ were laid. Even those that were called to be his assistants in the government had the spirit of prophecy, such a plentiful effusion was there of that spirit at that time, Num 11:25.

But after the death of Moses, for some ages, the Spirit of the Lord appeared and acted in the church of Israel more as a martial spirit than as a spirit of prophecy, and inspired men more for acting than speaking. I mean in the time of the judges. We find the Spirit of the Lord coming upon Othniel, Gideon, Samson, and others, for the service of their country, with their swords, not with their pens. Messages were then sent from heaven by angels, as to Gideon and Manoah, and to the people, Judg 2:1. In all the book of judges there is never once mention of a prophet, only Deborah is called a prophetess. Then the word of the Lord was precious; there was no open vision, 1 Sam 3:1. They had the law of Moses, recently written; let them study that. But in Samuel prophecy revived, and in him a famous epocha, or period of the church began, a time of great light in a constant uninterrupted succession of prophets, till some time after the captivity, when the canon of the Old Testament was completed in Malachi, and then prophecy ceased for nearly 400 years, till the coming of the great prophet and his forerunner.

Some prophets were divinely inspired to write the histories of the church. But they did not put their names to their writings; they only referred for proof to the authentic records of those times, which were known to be drawn up by prophets, as Gad, Iddo, etc. David and others were prophets, to write sacred songs for the use of the church. After them we often read of prophets sent on particular errands, and raised up for special public services, among whom the most famous were Elijah and Elisha in the kingdom of Israel. But none of these put their prophecies in writing, nor have we any remains of them but some fragments in the histories of their times; there was nothing of their own writing (that I remember) but one epistle of Elijah's, 2 Chron 21:12. But towards the latter end of the kingdoms of Judah and Israel, it pleased God to direct his

servants the prophets to write and publish some of their sermons, or abstracts of them. The dates of many of their prophecies are uncertain, but the earliest of them was in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and Jeroboam the second, his contemporary, king of Israel, about 200 years before the captivity, and not long after Joash had slain Zechariah the son of Jehoiada in the courts of the temple. If they begin to murder the prophets, yet they shall not murder their prophecies; these shall remain as witnesses against them. Hosea was the first of the writing prophets; and Joel, Amos, and Obadiah, published their prophecies about the same time. Isaiah began some time after, and not long; but his prophecy is placed first, because it is the largest of them all, and has most in it of him to whom all the prophets bore witness; and indeed so much of Christ that he is justly styled the Evangelical Prophet, and, by some of the ancients, a fifth Evangelist. We shall have the general title of this book (v. 1) and therefore shall here only observe some things,

I. Concerning the prophet himself. He was (if we may believe the tradition of the Jews) of the royal family, his father being (they say) brother to king Uzziah. He was certainly much at court, especially in Hezekiah's time, as we find in his story, to which many think it is owing that his style is more curious and polite than that of some other of the prophets, and, in some places, exceedingly lofty and soaring. The Spirit of God sometimes served his own purpose by the particular genius of the prophet; for prophets were not speaking trumpets, through which the Spirit spoke, but speaking men, by whom the Spirit spoke, making use of their natural powers, in respect both of light and flame, and advancing them above themselves.

II. Concerning the prophecy. It is transcendently excellent and useful; it was so to the church of God then, serving for conviction of sin, direction in duty, and consolation in trouble. Two great distresses of the church are here referred to, and comfort prescribed in reference to them, that by Sennacherib's invasion, which happened in his own time, and that of the captivity in Babylon, which happened long after; and in the supports and encouragements laid up for each of these times of need we find abundance of the grace of the gospel. There are not so many quotations in the gospels out of any, perhaps not out of all, the prophecies of the Old Testament, as out of this; nor such express testimonies concerning Christ, witness that of his being born of a virgin (ch. 7) and that of his sufferings, ch. 53. The beginning of this book abounds most with reproofs for sin and threatenings of judgment; the latter end of it is full of word words and comfortable words. This method the Spirit of Christ took formerly in the prophets and does still, first to convince and then to comfort; and those that would be blessed with the comforts must submit to the convictions. Doubtless Isaiah preached many sermons, and delivered many messages to the people, which are not written in this book, as Christ did; and probably these sermons were delivered more largely and fully than they are here related, but so much is left on record as Infinite Wisdom thought fit to convey to us on whom the ends of the world have come; and these prophecies, as well as the histories of Christ, are written that we might believe on the name of the Son of God, and that, believing, we might have life through his name; for to us is the gospel here preached as well as unto those that lived then, and more clearly. O that it may be mixed with faith!

Jeremiah

The Prophecies of the Old Testament, as the Epistles of the New, are placed rather according to their bulk than their seniority-- the longest first, not the oldest. There were several prophets, and writing ones, that were contemporaries with Isaiah, as Micah, or a little before him, as Hosea, and Joel, and Amos, or soon after him, as Habakkuk and Nahum are supposed to have been; and yet the prophecy of Jeremiah, who began many years after Isaiah finished, is placed next to his, because there is so much in it. Where we meet with most of God's word, there let the preference be given; and yet those of less gifts are not to be despised nor excluded. Nothing now occurs to be observed further concerning prophecy in general; but concerning this prophet Jeremiah we may observe,

I. That he was betimes a prophet; he began young, and therefore could say, from his own experience, that it is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth, the yoke both of service and of affliction, Lam 3:27.

Jerome observes that Isaiah, who had more years over his head, had his tongue touched with a coal of fire, to purge away his iniquity (6:7), but that when God touched Jeremiah's mouth, who was yet but young, nothing was said of the purging of his iniquity (1:9), because, by reason of his tender years, he had not so much sin to answer for.

II. That he continued long a prophet, some reckon fifty years, others above forty. He began in the thirteenth year of Josiah, when things went well under that good king, but he continued through all the wicked reigns that followed; for when we set out for the service of God, though the wind may then be fair and favourable, we know not how soon it may turn and be tempestuous.

III. That he was a reproving prophet, was sent in God's name to tell Jacob of their sins and to warn them of the judgments of God that were coming upon them; and the critics observe that therefore his style or manner of speaking is more plain and rough, and less polite, than that of Isaiah and some others of the prophets. Those that are sent to discover sin ought to lay aside the enticing words of man's wisdom. Plain-dealing is best when we are dealing with sinners to bring them to repentance.

IV. That he was a weeping prophet; so he is commonly called, not only because he penned the Lamentations, but because he was all along a mournful spectator of the sins of his people and of the desolating judgments that were coming upon them. And for this reason, perhaps, those who imagined our Saviour to be one of the prophets thought him of any of them to be most like to Jeremiah Matt 16:14, because he was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

V. That he was a suffering prophet. He was persecuted by his own people more than any of them, as we shall find in the story of this book; for he lived and preached just before the Jews' destruction by the Chaldeans, when their character seems to have been the same as it was just before their destruction by the Romans, when they killed the Lord Jesus, and persecuted his disciples, pleased not God, and were contrary to all men, for wrath had come upon them to the uttermost, 1 Thess 2:15-16.

The last account we have of him in his history is that the remaining Jews forced him to go down with them into Egypt; whereas the current tradition is, among Jews and Christians, that he suffered martyrdom. Hottinger, out of Elmakin, an Arabic historian, relates that, continuing to prophesy in Egypt against the Egyptians and other nations, he was stoned to death; and that long

after, when Alexander entered Egypt, he took up the bones of Jeremiah where they were buried in obscurity, and carried them to Alexandria, and buried them there.

The prophecies of this book which we have in the first nineteen chapters seem to be the heads of the sermons he preached in a way of general reproof for sin and denunciation of judgment; afterwards they are more particular and occasional, and mixed with the history of his day, but not placed in due order of time. With the threatenings are intermixed many gracious promises of mercy to the penitent, of the deliverance of the Jews out of their captivity, and some that have a plain reference to the kingdom of the Messiah. Among the Apocryphal writings an epistle is extant said to be written by Jeremiah to the captives in Babylon, warning them against the worship of idols, by exposing the vanity of idols and the folly of idolaters. It is in Baruch, ch. 6. But it is supposed not to be authentic; nor has it, I think, any thing like the life and spirit of Jeremiah's writings. It is also related concerning Jeremiah (2 Mac. 2:4) that, when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Chaldeans, he, by direction from God, took the ark and the altar of incense, and, carrying them to Mount Nebo lodged them in a hollow cave there and stopped the door; but some that followed him, and thought that they had marked the place, could not find it. He blamed them for seeking it, telling them that the place should be unknown till the time that God should gather his people together again. But I know not what credit is to be given to that story, though it is there said to be found in the records. We cannot but be concerned, in the reading of Jeremiah's prophecies, to find that they were so little regarded by the men of that generation; but let us make use of that as a reason why we should regard them the more; for they are written for our learning too, and for warning to us and to our land.

Matthew Henry's Commentary

Lamentations

Since what Solomon says, though contrary to the common opinion of the world, is certainly true, that sorrow is better than laughter, and it is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting, we should come to the reading and consideration of the melancholy chapters of this book, not only willingly, but with an expectation to edify ourselves by them; and, that we may do this, we must compose ourselves to a holy sadness and resolve to weep with the weeping prophet. Let us consider,

I. The title of this book; in the Hebrew it has one, but is called (as the books of Moses are) from the first word *Ecah*-- How; but the Jewish commentators call it, as the Greeks do, and we from them, *Kinoth*-- Lamentations.

As we have sacred odes or songs of joy, so have we sacred elegies or songs of lamentation; such variety of methods has Infinite Wisdom taken to work upon us and move our affections, and so soften our hearts and make them susceptible of the impressions of divine truths, as the wax of the seal. We have not only piped unto you, but have mourned likewise, Matt 11:17.

II. The penman of this book; it was Jeremiah the prophet, who is here Jeremiah the poet, and *vates* signifies both; therefore this book is fitly adjoined to the book of his prophecy, and is as an appendix to it.

We had there at large the predictions of the desolations of Judah and Jerusalem, and then the history of them, to show how punctually the predictions were accomplished, for the confirming of our faith: now here we have the expressions of his sorrow upon occasion of them, to show that he was very sincere in the protestations he had often made that he did not desire the woeful day, but that, on the contrary, the prospect of it filled him with bitterness. When he saw these calamities at a distance, he wished that his head were waters and his eyes fountains of tears; and, when they came, he made it to appear that he did not dissemble in that wish, and that he was far from being disaffected to his country, which was the crime his enemies charged him with. Though his country had been very unkind to him, and though the ruin of it was both a proof that he was a true prophet and a punishment of them for prosecuting him as a false prophet, which might have tempted him to rejoice in it, yet he sadly lamented it, and herein showed a better temper than that which Jonah was of with respect to Nineveh.

III. The occasion of these Lamentations was the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem by the Chaldean army and the dissolution of the Jewish state both civil and ecclesiastical thereby. Some of the rabbies will have these to be the Lamentations which Jeremiah penned upon occasion of the death of Josiah, which are mentioned 2 Chron 35:25. But, though it is true that that opened the door to all the following calamities, yet these Lamentations seem to be penned in the sight, not in the foresight, of those calamities-- when they had already come, not when they were at a distance; and these is nothing of Josiah in them, and his praise, as was no question, in the lamentations for him. No, it is Jerusalem's funeral that this is an elegy upon. Others of them will have these Lamentations to be contained in the roll which Baruch wrote from Jeremiah's mouth, and which Jehoiakim burnt, and they suggest that at first there were in it only the 1st, 2nd, and 4th chapters, but that the 3rd and 5th were the many like words that were afterwards added; but this is a groundless fancy; that roll is expressly said to be a repetition and summary of the prophet's sermons, Jer 36:2.

IV. The composition of it; it is not only poetical, but alphabetical, all except the 5th chapter, as some of David's psalms are; each verse begins with a several letter in the order of the Hebrew alphabet, the first aleph, the second beth, etc., but the 3rd chapter is a triple alphabet, the first three beginning with aleph, the next three with beth, etc., which was a help to memory (it being designed that these mournful ditties should be got by heart) and was an elegance in writing then valued and therefore not now to be despised. They observe that in the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th chapters, the letter pe is put before ain, which in all the Hebrew alphabets follows it, for a reason of which Dr. Lightfoot offers this conjecture, That the letter ajin, which is the numeral letter for Septuagint, was thus, by being displaced, made remarkable, to put them in mind of the seventy years at the end of which God would turn again their captivity.

V. The use of it: of great use, no doubt, it was to the pious Jews in their sufferings, furnishing them with spiritual language to express their natural grief by, helping to preserve the lively remembrance of Zion among them, and their children that never saw it, when they were in Babylon, directing their tears into the right channel (for they are here taught to mourn for sin and mourn to God), and withal encouraging their hopes that God would yet return and have mercy upon them; and it is of use to us, to affect us with godly sorrow for the calamities of the church of God, as becomes those that are living members of it and are resolved to take our lot with it.

The Era of the Exile and Return
586 BC - 331 BC

Ministry of Ezekiel ends	571	Ezekiel 17-21
Release of Jehoiachin	562	2 Kings 25:28
A Feast for Belshazzar	539	Daniel 5
Daniel in a den of lions	538	Daniel 6
Edict of Cyrus	538	2 Chronicles 36:22; Ezra 1:1
Zerubbabel appointed governor of Jerusalem	538	Ezra 1:5-2:70
Temple foundation laid	537	Ezra 3-6
Temple rebuilt	520	Ezra 4:24
Temple dedicated	516	Ezra 6:15
Feast of Ahasuerus (Xerxes I)	483	Esther 1
Esther becomes queen	479	Esther 2
A second return	458	Ezra 7:1,8,9
Return under Nehemiah	445	Nehemiah 2:1
Rebuilding of city wall	444	Nehemiah 6:15
Religious reforms		Nehemiah 10
Ministry of Malachi	430	Malachi 1-4
Nehemiah dies	c. 400	
Judah appointed High Priest	359	
Alexander the Great is greeted in Jerusalem	332	
Onias I Appointed High Priest	330	
Ptolemy conquers Jerusalem	320	
Seleucides rule Syria	312	
Egypt rules Palestine	301	

Septuagint (LXX) translated	284
Antiochus the Great rules Palestine	198
Revolt of the Maccabees	167
Temple rededicated	165
Judea freed	141
Rise of Pharisees/ Sadducees	109
Jerusalem taken by Pompey	63
Temple plundered by Crassus	54
Antipater appointed Procurator	47

**Herod the Great dies and Christ is born
4 BC**

Matthew Henry's Commentary

Ezekiel

When we entered upon the writings of the prophets, which speak of the things that should be hereafter, we seemed to have the same call that St. John had Rev 4:1, Come up hither; but, when we enter upon the prophecy of this book, it is as if the voice said, Come up higher; as we go forward in time (for Ezekiel prophesied in the captivity, as Jeremiah prophesied just before it), so we soar upward in discoveries yet more sublime of the divine glory. These waters of the sanctuary still grow deeper; so far are they from being fordable that in some places they are scarcely fathomable; yet, deep as they are, out of them flow streams which make glad the city of our God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High. As to this prophecy now before us, we may enquire,

I. Concerning the penman of it-- it was Ezekiel; his name signifies, The strength of God, or one girt or strengthened of God. He girded up the loins of his mind to the service, and God put strength into him.

Whom God calls to any service he will himself enable for it; if he give commission, he will give power to execute it. Ezekiel's name was answered when God said (and no doubt did as he said), I have made thy face strong against their faces. The learned Selden, in his book *De Diis Syris*, says that it was the opinion of some of the ancients that the prophet Ezekiel was the same with that Nazaratus Assyrius whom Pythagoras (as himself relates) had for his tutor for some time, and whose lectures he attended. It is agreed that they lived much about the same time; and we have reason to think that many of the Greek philosophers were acquainted with the sacred writings and borrowed some of the best of their notions from them. If we may give credit to the tradition of the Jews, he was put to death by the captives in Babylon, for his faithfulness and boldness in reproving them; it is stated that they dragged him upon the stones till his brains were dashed out. An Arabic historian says that he was put to death and was buried in the sepulchre of Shem the son of Noah. So Hottinger relates, *Thesaur. Philol. lib. 2 cap. 1.*

II. Concerning the date of it-- the place whence it is dated and the time when. The scene is laid in Babylon, when it was a house of bondage to the Israel of God; there the prophecies of this book were preached, there they were written, when the prophet himself, and the people to whom he prophesied, were captives there. Ezekiel and Daniel are the only writing prophets of the Old Testament who lived and prophesied any where but in the land of Israel, except we add Jonah, who was sent to Nineveh to prophesy. Ezekiel prophesied in the beginning of the captivity, Daniel in the latter end of it. It was an indication of God's good-will to them, and his gracious designs concerning them in their affliction, that he raised up prophets among them, both to convince them when, in the beginning of their troubles, they were secure and unhumbled, which was Ezekiel's business, and to comfort them when, in the latter end of their troubles, they were dejected and discouraged. If the Lord had been pleased to kill them, he would not have used such apt and proper means to cure them.

III. Concerning the matter and scope of it.

1. There is much in it that is very mysterious, dark, and hard to be understood, especially in the beginning and the latter end of it, which therefore the Jewish rabbin forbade the reading of to their young men, till they came to be thirty years of age, lest by the difficulties they met with there they should be prejudiced against the scriptures; but if we read these difficult parts of scripture with humility and reverence, and search them diligently, though we may not be able to

untie all the knots we meet with, any more than we can solve all the phenomena in the book of nature, yet we may from them, as from the book of nature, gather a great deal for the confirming of our faith and the encouraging of our hope in the God we worship.

2. Though the visions here be intricate, such as an elephant may swim in, yet the sermons are mostly plain, such as a lamb may wade in; and the chief design of them is to show God's people their transgressions, that in their captivity they might be repenting and not repining. It should seem the prophet was constantly attended (for we read of their sitting before him as God's people sat to hear his words, 33:31), and that he was occasionally consulted, for we read of the elders of Israel who came to enquire of the Lord by him, 14:1,3. And as it was of great use to the oppressed captives themselves to have a prophet with them, so it was a testimony to their holy religion against their oppressors who ridiculed it and them.

3. Though the reproofs and the threatenings here are very sharp and bold, yet towards the close of the book very comfortable assurances are given of great mercy God had in store for them; and there, at length, we shall meet with something that has reference to gospel times, and which was to have its accomplishment in the kingdom of the Messiah, of whom indeed this prophet speaks less than almost any of the prophets. But by opening the terrors of the Lord he prepares Christ's way. By the law is the knowledge of sin, and so it becomes our school-master to bring us to Christ.

The visions which were the prophet's credentials we have ch. 1-3, the reproofs and threatenings ch. 4-24 betwixt which and the comforts which we have in the latter part of the book we have messages sent to the nations that bordered upon the land of Israel, whose destruction is foretold (ch. 25-35), to make way for the restoration of God's Israel and the re-establishment of their city and temple, which are foretold ch. 36 to the end. Those who would apply the comforts to themselves must apply the convictions to themselves.

The Ptolemies and the Seleucids

Daniel 11:5-35

PTOLEMIES
Kings "of the South"
Egypt

SELEUCIDS
Kings "of the North"
Syria

Daniel 11:5 Ptolemy I Soter	BC 323-285	Daniel 11:5 Seleucus I Nicator	BC 312-281
		Antiochus I Soter Daniel 11:6	281-262
Ptolemy II Philadelphus	285-246	Antiochus II Theos	262-246
Daniel 11:7-8 Ptolemy III Euergetes	246-221	Daniel 11:7-9 Seleucus II Callinicus	246-227
		Daniel 11:10 Seleucus III Soter	227-223
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Matthew Henry's Commentary

Daniel

The book of Ezekiel left the affairs of Jerusalem under a doleful aspect, all in ruins, but with a joyful prospect of all in glory again. This of Daniel fitly follows. Ezekiel told us what was seen, and what was foreseen, by him in the former years of the captivity: Daniel tells us what was seen, and foreseen, in the latter years of the captivity. When God employs different hands, yet it is about the same work. And it was a comfort to the poor captives that they had first one prophet among them and then another, to show them how long, and a sign that God had not quite cast them off. Let us inquire,

I. Concerning this prophet His Hebrew name was Daniel, which signifies the judgment of God; his Chaldean name was Belteshazzar. He was of the tribe of Judah, and, as it should seem, of the royal family. He was betimes eminent for wisdom and piety. Ezekiel, his contemporary, but much his senior, speaks of him as an oracle when thus he upbraids the king of Tyre with his conceitedness of himself: Thou art wiser than Daniel, Ezek 38:3. He is likewise there celebrated for success in prayer, when Noah, Daniel, and Job are reckoned as three men that had the greatest interest in heaven of any, Ezek 14:14.

He began betimes to be famous, and continued long so. Some of the Jewish rabbins are loth to acknowledge him to be a prophet of the higher form, and therefore rank his book among the Hagiographa, (NT:40; NT:1124) not among the prophecies, and would not have their disciples pay much regard to it. One reason they pretend is because he did not live such a mean mortified life as Jeremiah and some other of the prophets did, but lived like a prince, and was a prime-minister of state; whereas we find him persecuted as other prophets were (ch. 6), and mortifying himself as other prophets did, when he ate no pleasant bread (10:3), and fainting sick when he was under the power of the Spirit of prophecy, 8:27.

Another reason they pretend is because he wrote his book in a heathen country, and there had his visions, and not in the land of Israel; but, for the same reason, Ezekiel also must be expunged out of the roll of prophets. But the true reason is that he speaks so plainly of the time of the Messiah's coming that the Jews cannot avoid the conviction of it and therefore do not care to hear of it. But Josephus calls him one of the greatest of the prophets, nay, the angel Gabriel calls him a man greatly beloved. He lived long an active life in the courts and councils of some of the greatest monarchs the world ever had, Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, Darius; for we mistake if we confine the privilege of an intercourse with heaven to speculative men, or those that spend their time in contemplation; no, who was more intimately acquainted with the mind of God than Daniel, a courtier, a statesman, and a man of business? The Spirit, as the wind, blows where it lists. And, if those that have much to do in the world plead that as an excuse for the infrequency and slightness of their converse with God, Daniel will condemn them. Some have thought that he returned to Jerusalem, and was one of the masters of the Greek synagogue; but nothing of that appears in scripture; it is therefore generally concluded that he died in Persia at Susan, where he lived to be very old.

I. Concerning this book. The first six chapters of it are historical, and are plain and

easy; the last six are prophetic, and in them are many things dark, and hard to be understood, which yet would be more intelligible if we had a more complete history of the nations, and especially the Jewish nation, from Daniel's time to the coming of the Messiah. Our Saviour intimates the difficulty of apprehending the sense of Daniel's prophecies when, speaking of them, he says, Let him that readeth understand, Matt 24:15. The first chapter, and the first three verses of the second chapter, are in Hebrew; thence to the eighth chapter is in the Chaldee dialect; and thence to the end is in Hebrew. Mr. Broughton observes that, as the Chaldeans were kind to Daniel, and gave cups of cold water to him when he requested it, rather than the king's wine, God would not have them lose their reward, but made that language which they taught him to have honour in his writings through all the world, unto this day. Daniel, according to his computation, continues the holy story from the first surprising of Jerusalem by the Chaldean Babel, when he himself was carried away captive, until the last destruction of it by Rome, the mystical Babel, for so far forward his predictions look, 9:27. The fables of Susannah, and of Bel and the Dragon, in both which Daniel is made a party, are apocryphal stories, which we think we have no reason to give any credit to, they being never found in the Hebrew or Chaldee, but only in the Greek, nor ever admitted by the Jewish church. There are some both of the histories and of the prophecies of this book that bear date in the latter end of the Chaldean monarchy, and others of both that are dated in the beginning of the Persian monarchy. But both Nebuchadnezzar's dream, which Daniel interpreted, and his own visions, point at the Grecian and Roman monarchies, and very particularly at the Jews' troubles under Antiochus, which it would be of great use to them to prepare for; as his fixing the very time for the coming of the Messiah was of use to all those that waited for the consolation of Israel, and is to us, for the confirming of our belief, That this is he who should come, and we are to look for no other.

Matthew Henry's Commentary

Hosea

I. We have now before us the twelve minor prophets, which some of the ancients, in reckoning up the books of the Old Testament, put all together, and reckon but as one book. They are called the minor prophets, not because their writings are of any less authority or usefulness than those of the greater prophets, or as if these prophets were less in God's account or might be so in ours than the other, but only because they are shorter, and less in bulk, than the other. We have reason to think that these prophets preached as much as the others, but that they did not write so much, nor is so much of their preaching kept upon record. Many excellent prophets wrote nothing, and others but little, who yet were very useful in their day. And so in the Christian church there have been many burning and shining lights, who are not known to posterity by their writings, and yet were no way inferior in gifts, and graces, and serviceableness to their own generation, than those who are; and some who have left but little behind them, and make no great figure among authors, were yet as valuable men as the more voluminous writers. These twelve small prophets, Josephus says, were put into one volume by the men of the great synagogue in Ezra's time, of which learned and pious body of men the last three of these twelve prophets are supposed to have been themselves members. These are what remained of the scattered pieces of inspired writing. Antiquaries value the *fragmenta veterum*-- the fragments of antiquity; these are the fragments of prophecy, which are carefully gathered up by the divine Providence and the care of the church, that nothing might be lost, as St. Paul's short epistles after his long ones. The son of Sirach speaks of these twelve prophets with honour, as men that strengthened Jacob, Ecclus. 49:10. Nine of these prophets prophesied before the captivity, and the last three after the return of the Jews to their own land. Some difference there is in the order of these books. We place them as the ancient Hebrew did; and all agree to put Hosea first; but the ancient thing is not material. And, if we covet to place them according to their seniority, as to some of them we shall find no certainty.

II. We have before us the prophecy of Hosea, who was the first of all the writing prophets, being raised up somewhat before the time of Isaiah. The ancients say, He was of Bethshemesh, and of the tribe of Issachar. He continued very long a prophet; the Jews reckoned that he prophesied nearly fourscore and ten years; so that, as Jerome observes, he prophesied of the destruction of the kingdom of the ten tribes when it was at a great distance, and lived himself to see and lament it, and to improve it when it was over, for warning to its sister kingdom. The scope of his prophecy is to discover sin, and to denounce the judgments of God against a people that would not be reformed. The style is very concise and sententious, above any of the prophets; and in some places it seems to be like the book of Proverbs, without connexion, and rather to be called Hosea's sayings than Hosea's sermons. And a weighty adage may sometimes do more service than a laboured discourse. Huetius observes that many passages in the prophecies of Jeremiah and Ezekiel seem to refer to, and to be borrowed from, the prophet Hosea, who wrote a good while before them. As Jer 7:34; 16:9; 25:10; and Ezek 26:13, speak the same with Hos 2:11; so Ezek 16:16, etc., is taken from Hos 2:8. And that promise of serving the Lord their God, and David their king, Jer 30:8-9. Ezek 34:23, Hosea had before, 3:5. And Ezek 19:12 is taken

from Hos 13:15. Thus one prophet confirms and corroborates another; and all these worketh that one and the self-same Spirit.

Matthew Henry's Commentary

Joel

We are altogether uncertain concerning the time when this prophet prophesied; it is probable that it was about the same time Amos prophesied, not for the reason that the rabbin give, "Because Amos begins his prophecy with that wherewith Joel concludes his, The Lord shall roar out of Zion," but for the reason Dr. Lightfoot gives, "Because he speaks of the same judgments of locusts, and drought, and fire, that Amos laments, which is an intimation that they appeared about the same time, Amos in Israel and Joel in Judah. Hosea and Obadiah prophesied about the same time; and it appears that Amos prophesied in the days of Jeroboam, the second king of Israel, Amos 7:10. God sent a variety of prophets, that they might strengthen the hands one of another, and that out of the mouth of two or three witnesses every word might be established. In this prophecy,

- I. The desolations made by hosts of noxious insects is described, ch. 1 and part of ch. 2.
- II. The people are hereupon called to repentance, ch. 2.
- III. Promises are made of the return of mercy upon their repentance (ch. 2), and promises of the pouring out of the Spirit in the latter days.
- IV. The cause of God's people is pleaded against their enemies, whom God would in due time reckon with (ch. 3); and glorious things are spoken of the gospel-Jerusalem and of the prosperity and perpetuity of it.

Matthew Henry's Commentary

Amos

Though this prophet appeared a little before Isaiah, yet he was not, as some have mistaken, that Amos who was the father of Isaiah Isa 1:1, for in the Hebrew their names are very different; their families too were of a different character, for Isaiah was a courtier, Amos a country-farmer. Amos signifies a burden, whence the Jews have a tradition that he was of a slow tongue and spoke with stammering lips; we may rather, in allusion to his name, say that his speech was weighty and his word the burden of the Lord. He was (as most think) of Judah, yet prophesied chiefly against Israel, and at Bethel, 7:13. Some think his style savours of his extraction, and is more plain and rustic than that of some other of the prophets; I do not see it so; but it is plain that his matter agreed with that of his contemporary Hosea, that out of the mouth of these two witnesses the word might be established. It appears by his contest with Amaziah the priest of Bethel that he met with opposition in his work, but was a man of undaunted resolution in it, faithful and bold in reproofing sin and denouncing the judgments of God for it, and pressing in his exhortations to repentance and reformation. He begins with threatenings against the neighbouring nations that were enemies to Israel, ch. 1 and 2. He then calls Israel to account, and judges them for their idolatry, their unworthy walking under the favours God had bestowed upon them, and their incorrigibleness under his judgments, ch. 3 and 4. He calls them to repentance (ch. 5), rejecting their hypocritical sacrifices unless they did repent. He foretells the desolations that were coming upon them notwithstanding their security (ch. 6), some particular judgments (ch. 7), particularly on Amaziah; and, after other reproofs and threatenings (ch. 8 and 9), concludes with a promise of the setting up of the Messiah's kingdom and the happiness of God's spiritual Israel therein, just as the prophecy of Joel concluded. These prophets, having opened the wound in their reproofs and threatenings, which show all wrong, in the promises of gospel-grace open the remedy, which alone will set all to rights.

Matthew Henry's Commentary

Jonah

This book of Jonah, though it be placed here in the midst of the prophetic books of scripture, is yet rather a history than a prophecy; one line of prediction there is in it, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown; the rest of the book is a narrative of the preface to and the consequences of that prediction. In the midst of the obscure prophecies before and after this book, wherein are many things dark and hard to be understood, which are puzzling to the learned, and are strong meat for strong men, comes in this plain and pleasant story, which is entertaining to the weakest, and milk for babes. Probably Jonah was himself the penman of this book, and he, as Moses and other inspired penmen, records his own faults, which is an evidence that in these writings they designed God's glory and not their own. We read of this same Jonah 2 Kings 14:25, where we find that he was of Gath-hepher in Galilee, a city that belonged to the tribe of Zebulun, in a remote corner of the land of Israel; for the Spirit, which like the wind, blows where it listeth, will as easily find out Jonah in Galilee as Isaiah at Jerusalem. We find also that he was a messenger of mercy to Israel in the reign of Jeroboam the second; for the success of his arms, in the restoring of the coast of Israel, is said to be according to the word of the Lord which he spoke by the hand of his servant Jonah the prophet. Those prophecies were not committed to writing, but this against Nineveh was, chiefly for the sake of the story that depends upon it, and that is recorded chiefly for the sake of Christ, of whom Jonah was a type; it contains also very remarkable instances of human infirmity in Jonah, and of God's mercy both in pardoning repenting sinners, witness Nineveh, and in bearing with repining saints, witness Jonah.

Matthew Henry's Commentary

Micah

We shall have some account of this prophet in the first verse of the book of his prophecy; and therefore shall here only observe that, being contemporary with the prophet Isaiah (only that he began to prophesy a little after him), there is a near resemblance between that prophet's prophecy and this; and there is a prediction of the advancement and establishment of the gospel-church, which both of them have, almost in the same words, that out of the mouth of two such witnesses so great a word might be established. Compare Isa 2:2-3, with Mic 4:1-2. Isaiah's prophecy is said to be concerning Judah and Jerusalem, but Micah's concerning Samaria and Jerusalem; for, though this prophecy be dated only by the reigns of the kings of Judah, yet it refers to the kingdom of Israel, the approaching ruin of which, in the captivity of the ten tribes, he plainly foretells and sadly laments. What we find here in writing was but an abstract of the sermons he preached during the reigns of three kings. The scope of the whole is,

- I. To convince sinners of their sins, by setting them in order before them, charging both Israel and Judah with idolatry, covetousness, oppression, contempt of the word of God, and their rulers especially, both in church and state, with the abuse of their power; and also by showing them the judgments of God ready to break in upon them for their sins.
- II. To comfort God's people with promises of mercy and deliverance, especially with an assurance of the coming of the Messiah and of the grace of the gospel through him. It is remarkable concerning this prophecy, and confirms its authority, that we find two quotations out of it made publicly upon very solemn occasions, and both referring to very great events.
 1. One is a prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem (3:12), which we find quoted in the Old Testament, by the elders of the land Jer 26:17-18, in justification of Jeremiah, when he foretold the judgments of God coming upon Jerusalem, and to stay the proceedings of the court against him. "Micah (say they) foretold that Zion should be ploughed as a field, and Hezekiah did not put him to death; why then should we punish Jeremiah for saying the same?"
 2. Another is a prediction of the birth of Christ (5:2) which we find quoted in the New Testament, by the chief priests and scribes of the people, in answer to Herod's enquiry, where Christ should be born Matt 2:5-6; for still we find that to him bear all the prophets witness.

Matthew Henry's Commentary

Nahum

The name of this prophet signifies a comforter; for it was a charge given to all the prophets, Comfort you, comfort you, my people: and even this prophet, though wholly taken up in foretelling the destruction of Nineveh, which speaks terror to the Assyrians, is, even in that, comforter to the ten tribes of Israel, who, it is probable, were now lately carried captives into Assyria. It is very uncertain at what time he lived and prophesied, but it is most probable that he lived in the time of Hezekiah, and prophesied against Nineveh, after the captivity of Israel by the king of Assyria, which was in the ninth year of Hezekiah, and before Sennacherib's invading Judah, which was in the fourteenth year of Hezekiah, for to that attempt, and the defeat of it, it is supposed, the first chapter has reference; and it is probable that it was delivered a little before it, for the encouragement of God's people in that day of treading down and perplexity. It is the conjecture of the learned Huetius that the two other chapters of this book were delivered by Nahum some years after, perhaps in the reign of Manasseh, and in that reign the Jewish chronologies generally place him, somewhat nearer to the time when Nineveh was conquered, and the Assyrian monarchy reduced, by Cyaxares and Nebuchadnezzar, some time before the first captivity of Judah. It is probable that Nahum did by word of mouth prophesy many things concerning Israel and Judah, as it is certain that Jonah did 2 Kings 14:25, though we have nothing of either of them in writing, but what related to Nineveh, of which though a great and ancient city, yet probably we should never have heard in sacred writ if the Israel of God had not had some concern in it.

Matthew Henry's Commentary

Habakkuk

It is a very foolish fancy of some of the Jewish rabbin that this prophet was the son of the Shunamite woman that was at first miraculously given, and afterwards raised to life, by Elisha (2 Kings 4), as they say also that the prophet Jonah was the son of the widow of Zarephath, which Elijah raised to life. It is a more probable conjecture of their modern chronologers that he lived and prophesied in the reign of king Manasseh, when wickedness abounded, and destruction was hastening on, destruction by the Chaldeans, whom this prophet mentions as the instruments of God's judgments; and Manasseh was himself carried to Babylon, as an earnest of what should come afterwards. In the apocryphal story of Bel and the Dragon mention is made of Habakkuk the prophet in the land of Judah, who was carried thence by an angel to Babylon, to feed Daniel in the den; those who give credit to that story take pains to reconcile our prophet's living before the captivity, and foretelling it, with that. Huetius thinks that that was another of the same name, a prophet, this of the tribe of Simeon, that of Levi; others that he lived so long as to the end of that captivity, though he prophesied of it before it came. And some have imagined that Habakkuk's feeding Daniel in the den is to be understood mystically, that Daniel then lived by faith, as Habakkuk had said the just should do; he was fed by that word, Hab 2:4. The prophecy of this book is a mixture of the prophet's addresses to God in the people's name and to the people in God's name; for it is the office of the prophet to carry messages both ways. We have in it a lively representation of the intercourse and communion between a gracious God and a gracious soul. The whole refers particularly to the invasion of the land of Judah by the Chaldeans, which brought spoil upon the people of God, a just punishment of the spoil they had been guilty of among themselves; but it is of general use, especially to help us through that great temptation with which good men have in all ages been exercised, arising from the power and prosperity of the wicked and the sufferings of the righteous by it.

Matthew Henry's Commentary

Zephaniah

This prophet is placed last, as he was last in time, of all the minor prophets before the captivity, and not long before Jeremiah, who lived at the time of the captivity. He foretels the general destruction of Judah and Jerusalem by the Chaldeans, and sets their sins in order before them, which had provoked God to bring their ruin upon them, calls them to repentance, threatens the neighboring nations with the like destruction, and gives encouraging promises of their joyful return out of captivity in due time, which have a reference to the grace of the gospel. We have, in the first verse, an account of the prophet and the date of his prophecy, which supersedes our enquiry concerning them here.

Matthew Henry's Commentary

Haggai

The captivity in Babylon gave a very remarkable turn to the affairs of the Jewish church both in history and prophecy. It is made a signal epocha in our Saviour's genealogy, Matt 1:17. Nine of the twelve minor prophets, whose oracles we have been hitherto consulting, lived and preached before that captivity, and most of them had an eye to it in their prophecies, foretelling it as the just punishment of Jerusalem's wickedness. But the last three (in whom the Spirit of prophecy took its period, until it revived in Christ's forerunner) lived and preached after the return out of captivity, not immediately upon it, but some time after. Haggai and Zechariah appeared much about the same time, eighteen years after the return, when the building of the temple was both retarded by its enemies and neglected by its friends. Then the prophets, Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied unto the Jews that were in Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel, even unto them (so we read Ezra 5:1), to reprove them for their remissness, and to encourage them to revive that good work when it had stood still for some time, and to go on with it vigorously, notwithstanding the opposition they met with in it.

Haggai began two months before Zechariah, who was raised up to second him, that out of the mouth of two witnesses the word might be established. But Zechariah continued longer at the work; for all Haggai's prophecies that are recorded were delivered within four months, in the second year of Darius, between the beginning of the sixth month and the end of the ninth. But we have Zechariah's prophecies dated above two years after, Zech 7:1. Some have the honour to lead, others to last, in the work of God. The Jews ascribe to these two prophets the honour of being members of the great synagogue (as they call it), which was formed after the return out of captivity; we think it more certain, and it was their honour, and a much greater honour, that they prophesied of Christ. Haggai spoke of him as the glory of the latter house, and Zechariah as the man, the branch. In them the light of that morning star shone more brightly than in the foregoing prophecies, as they lived nearer the time of the rising of the Sun of righteousness, and now began to see his day approaching. The Septuagint makes Haggai and Zechariah to be the penmen of Ps 138 and Ps 146; 147, and 148.

Matthew Henry's Commentary

Zechariah

This prophet was colleague with the prophet Haggai, and a worker together with him in forwarding the building of the second temple Ezra 5:1; for two are better than one. Christ sent forth his disciples two and two. Zechariah began to prophesy some time after Haggai. But he continued longer, soared higher in visions and revelations, wrote more, and prophesied more particularly concerning Christ, than Haggai had done; so the last shall be first: the last in time sometimes proves first in dignity. He begins with a plain practical sermon, expressive of that which was the scope of his prophesying, in the first five verses; but afterwards, to the end of ch. 6, he relates the visions he saw, and the instructions he received immediately from heaven by them. At ch. 7, from an enquiry made by the Jews concerning fasting, he takes occasion to show them the duty of their present day, and to encourage them to hope for God's favour, to the end of ch. 8, after which there are two sermons, which are both called burdens of the word of the Lord (one begins with ch. 9, the other with ch. 12), which probably were preached some time after; the scope of them is to reprove for sin, and threaten God's judgments against the impenitent, and to encourage those that feared God with assurances of the mercy God had in store for his church, and especially of the coming of the Messiah and the setting up of his kingdom in the world.

Matthew Henry's Commentary

Malachi

God's prophets were his witnesses to his church, each in his day, for several ages, witnesses for him and his authority, witnesses against sin and sinners, attesting the true intents of God's providences in his dealings with his people then and the kind intentions of his grace concerning his church in the days of the Messiah, to whom all the prophets bore witness, for they all agreed in their testimony; and now we have only one witness more to call, and we have done with our evidence; and though he be the last, and in him prophecy ceased, yet the Spirit of prophecy shines as clearly, as strongly, as brightly in him as in any that went before, and his testimony challenges an equal regard. The Jews say, Prophecy continued forty years under the second temple, and this prophet they call the seal of prophecy, because in him the series or succession of prophets broke off and came to a period. God wisely ordered it so that divine inspiration should cease for some ages before the coming of the Messiah, that that great prophet might appear the more conspicuous and distinguishable and be the more welcome. Let us consider,

- I. The person of the prophet. We have only his name, Malachi, and no account of his country or parentage. Malachi(OT:4397) signifies my angel, which has given occasion for a conjecture that this prophet was indeed an angel from heaven and not a man, as that Judg 2:1. But there is no just ground for the conjecture. Prophets were messengers, God's messengers; this prophet was so; his name is the very same with that which we find in the original (3:1) for my messenger; and perhaps from that word he might (though, probably, he had another name) be called Malachi. The Chaldee paraphrase, and some of the Jews, suggest that Malachi was the same with Ezra; but that also is groundless. Ezra was a scribe, but we never read that he was a prophet. Others, yet further from probability, make him to be Mordecai. But we have reason to conclude he was a person whose proper name was that by which he is here called; the tradition of some of the ancients is that he was of the tribe of Zebulun, and that he died young.
- II. The scope of the prophecy. Haggai and Zechariah were sent to reprove the people for delaying to build the temple; Malachi was sent to reprove them for the neglect of it when it was built, and for their profanation of the temple-service (for from idolatry and superstition they ran into the other extreme of impiety and irreligion), and the sins he witnesses against are the same that we find complained of in Nehemiah's time, with whom, it is probable, he was contemporary. And now that prophecy was to cease he speaks more clearly of the Messiah, as nigh at hand, than any other of the prophets had done, and concludes with a direction to the people of God to keep in remembrance the law of Moses, while they were in expectation of the gospel of Christ.