

their own time. God had a message for the people then living, and there was doubtless much of prophetic speaking that was not preserved, because it did not have a great deal to say to future ages. But if the prophets are not simply human observers, but carriers of a divine message, and if God is omnipotent and not only knows the future but controls it, it would be strange indeed if they did not drive home the importance of their present messages by declaring God's intentions for the future, and present future events as a consideration that should influence immediate actions. Much of this, of course, consists of declarations of the judgment that God will bring upon the people for their sin. Much of it consists of description of the terrors of the exile and of various features of the chastisement that God intends to bring to His erring people. But there is another aspect that is very widely found among the prophets, one that the liberal interpreters tend almost universally to overlook. This aspect relates to the attitude of the prophets to those people who were firmly convinced that the prophets spoke from God and who therefore would tend to accept all their declarations as true.

As the prophets in verse after verse, sometimes in chapter after chapter, declare the misery of the exile and destruction that God will bring upon the people for their sin and for their forgetfulness of God's righteous law, that portion of the people that we can rightly call "the godly" must have been stricken to the heart by the prophets' words. There were doubtless many who were doing their utmost to follow the teachings that God had given in the past. Yet they saw the nation as a whole going further into sin, rejecting God's law, and even sometimes persecuting the prophets whom God had sent. They heard the prophetic declarations against the widespread sin of their nation, and must have been greatly disturbed as they observed how little the bulk of the people were heeding the prophet's words.