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COMMENTARY ON THE WHOLE BIBLE

Preface to Volume Four

by Matthew Henry

To the Students of the Words, Works and Ways of God:

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PREFACE TO VOLUME FOUR

Those books of scripture are all prophetic of which here, *in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling*, we have endeavoured a methodical explication and a practical improvement. I call them *prophetic* because so they are for the main, though we have some histories (here and there brought in for the illustration of the prophecies) and a book of Lamentations. Our Saviour often puts *the Law and the Prophets* for all the Old Testament. The prophets, by waiving the ceremonial precepts, and not insisting on them, but only on the weightier matters of the law, plainly intimated the abolishing of that part of the law of Moses by the gospel; and by their many predictions of Christ, and the kingdom of his grace, they intimated the accomplishing the perfecting of that part of the law of Moses in the gospel. Thus the prophets were the *nexus — the connecting bond* between the law and the gospel, and are therefore fitly placed between them.

These books, being prophetic, are, as such, divine, and of heavenly origin and extraction. We have human laws, human histories, and human poems, as well as divine ones, but we can have no human prophecies. Wise and good men may make prudent conjectures concerning future events (*moral prognostications* we call them); but it is essential to true prophecy that it be of God. The learned Huetius (*Demonstrat. Evang. pag. 15*) lays this down for one of his axioms, *Omnis prophetica facultas ... Deo est — The prophetic talent is entirely from God*; and he proves it to be the sense both of Jews and heathen that it is God's prerogative to foresee things to come, and that whoever had such a power had it from God. And therefore the Jews reckon all prophecy to be given by the highest degree of inspiration, except that which was peculiar to Moses. When our Saviour asked the chief priests whether John's baptism were from heaven or of men, they durst not say *Of men*, because the people counted him a prophet, and, if so, then not of men. The Hebrew name for a prophet is *nby'* — *a speaker, preacher, or orator, a messenger, or interpreter*, that delivers God's messages to the children of men, as a herald to proclaim war or an ambassador to treat of peace. But then it must be remembered that he was formerly called *r'h* or *hsh*, that is, *a seer* (~~1~~ Samuel 9:9); for prophets, with the eyes of their minds, first saw what they were to speak and then spoke what they had seen.

Prophecy, taken strictly, is the foretelling of things to come; and there were those to whom God gave this power, not only that it might be a sign for the confirming of the faith of the church concerning the doctrine preached when the things foretold should be fulfilled, but for warning, instruction, and comfort, in prospect of what they themselves might not live to see accomplished, but which should be fulfilled in its season: so predictions of things to come long after might be of present use.

The learned Dr. Grew (*Cosmol. sacra, lib. 4, cap. 6*) describes prophecy in this sense to be, “A declaration of the divine prescience, looking at any distance through a train of infinite causes, known and unknown to us, upon a sure and certain effect.” Hence he infers, “That the being of prophecies supposes the non-being of contingents; for, though there are many things which seem to us to be contingents, yet, were they so indeed, there could have been no prophecy; and there can be no contingent seemingly so loose and independent but it is a link of some chain.” And Huetius gives this reason why none but God can foretel things to come, Because every effect depends upon an infinite number of preceding causes, all which, in their order, must be known to him that foretels the effect, and therefore to God only, for he alone is omniscient. So Tully argues: *Qui teneat causas rerum futurarum, idem necesse est omnia teneat quae futura sint; quod facere nemo nisi Deus potest* — *He who knows the causes of future events must necessarily know the events themselves; this is the prerogative of God alone* (Cicero de *Divin. lib. 1*). And therefore we find that by *this* the God of Israel proves himself to be God, that by his prophets he foretold things to come, which came to pass according to the prediction, ²³⁴⁹Isaiah 46:9, 10. And by *this* he disproves the pretensions of the Pagan deities, that they could not show the *things that were to come to pass hereafter*, ²³⁴²³Isaiah 41:23. Tertullian proves the divine authority of the scripture from the fulfilling of scripture-prophecies: *Idoneum, opinor, testimonium divinitatis, veritas divinationis* — *I conceive the accomplishment of prophecy to be a satisfactory attestation from God* (*Apol. cap. 20*). And, besides the foretelling of things to come, the discovering of things secret by revelation from God is a branch of prophecy, as Ahijah's discovering Jeroboam's wife in disguise, and Elisha's telling Gehazi what passed between him and Naaman. But (Du Pin, *Hist. of the Canon. lib. 1, cap. 2*) prophecy, in scripture language, is taken more largely for a declaration of such things to the children of men, either by word or writing, as God has revealed to those that speak or write

it, by vision, dream, or inspiration, guiding their minds, their tongues, and pens, by his Holy Spirit, and giving them not only ability, but authority, to declare such things in his name, and to preface what they say with, *Thus saith the Lord*. In this sense it is said, The prophecy of scripture *came not in old time by the will of man*, as other pious moral discourses might, *but holy men spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*,  Peter 1:20, 21. The same Holy Spirit that moved upon the face of the waters to produce the world moved upon the minds of the prophets to produce the Bible.

Now I think it is worthy to be observed that all nations, having had some sense of God and religion, have likewise had a notion of prophets and prophecy, have had a veneration for them, and a desire and expectation of acquaintance and communion with the gods they worshipped in that way. Witness their oracles, their augurs, and the many arts of divination they had in use among them in all the ages and all the countries of the world.

It is commonly urged as an argument against the atheists, to prove that there is a God, That all nations of the world acknowledged some god or other, some Being above them, to be worshipped and prayed to, to be trusted in and praised; the most ignorant and barbarous nations could not avoid the knowledge of it; the most learned and polite nations could not avoid the belief of it. And this is a sufficient proof of the general and unanimous consent of mankind to this truth, though far the greatest part of men made to themselves gods which yet were no gods. Now I think it may be urged with equal force against the Deists, for the proof of a divine revelation, that all nations of the world had, and had veneration for, that which they at least took to be a divine revelation, and could not live without it, though in this also they became *vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened*. But, if there were not a true deity and a true prophecy, there would never have been pretended deities and counterfeit prophecies.

Lycurgus and Numa, those two great lawgivers of the Spartan and Roman commonwealths, brought their people to an observance of their laws by possessing them with a notion that they had them by divine revelation, and so making it a point of religion to observe them. And those that have been ever so little conversant with the Greek and Roman histories, as well as with the more ancient ones of Chaldea and Egypt cannot but remember what a profound deference their princes and great commanders, and not

their unthinking commonalty only, paid to the oracles and prophets, and the prognostications of their soothsayers, which, in all cases of importance, were consulted with abundance of gravity and solemnity, and how often the resolutions of councils and the motions of mighty armies turned upon them, though they appeared ever so groundless and farfetched.

There is a full account given by that learned philosopher and physician Caspar Peucer (De Praecipuis Divinationum Generibus, A. 1591) of the many kinds of divination and prediction used among the Gentiles, by which they took on them to tell the fortune both of states and particular persons. They were all, he says, reduced by Plato to two heads: *Divinatio Mantike*, which was a kind of inspiration, or was thought to be so, the prophet or prophetess foretelling things to come by an internal *flatus* or fury; such was the oracle of Apollo at Delphos, and that of Jupiter Trophonius, which, with others like them, were famous for many ages, during the prevalency of the kingdom of darkness, but (as appears by some of the Pagan writers themselves) they were all silenced and struck dumb, when the gospel (that truly divine oracle) began to be preached to the nations. The other kind of divination was that which he calls *Oionistike*, which was a prognostication by signs, according to rules of art, as by the flight of birds, the entrails of beasts, by stars or meteors, and abundance of ominous accidents, with which a foolish world was miserably imposed upon. A large account of this matter we have also in the late learned dissertations of Anton. Van Dale, to which I refer the reader (De Verf ac Falsf Prophetif, A. 1696). But nothing of this kind made a greater noise in the Gentile world than the oracles of the Sibyls and their prophecies. Their name signifies *a divine counsel*: *Sibyllae*, qu. *Siobulae*, *Sios*, in the Aeolic dialect, being put for *Theos*. Peucer says, “Almost every nation had its Sibyls, but those of Greece were most celebrated.” They lived in several ages; the most ancient is said to be the *Sibylla Delphica*, who lived before the Trojan war, or about that time. The *Sibylla Erythrea* was the most noted; she lived about the time of Alexander the Great. But it the *Sibylla Cumana* of whom the story goes that she presented herself, and nine books of oracles, to Tarquinius Superbus, which she offered to sell him at so vast a rate that he refused to purchase them, upon which she burnt three, and, upon his second refusal, three more, but made him give the same rate for the remaining three, which were deposited with great care in the Capitol. But, those being afterwards burnt accidentally with the Capitol, a

collection was made of other Sibylline oracles, and those are they which Virgil refers to in his fourth Eclogue (Vid. Virg. Aeneid. *lib.* 6). All the oracles of the Sibyls that are extant were put together, and published, in Holland, not many years ago, by Seryatius Gallaeus, in Greek and Latin, with large and learned notes, together with all that could be met with of the metrical oracles that go under the names of Jupiter, Apollo, Serapis, and others, by Joannes Opsopaeus.

The oracles of the Sibyls were appealed to by many of the fathers for the confirmation of the Christian religion. Justin Martyr (Ad Graecos Cohortat. *juxta finem.*) appeals with a great deal of assurance, persuading the Greeks to give credit to that ancient Sibyl, whose works were extant all the world over; and to their testimony, and that of Hydaspis, he appeals concerning the general conflagration and the torments of hell. Clemens Alexandrinus (Apol. 2. *p.* mihi. 66. *l.*) often quotes the Sibyls' verses with great respect; so does Lactantius (Quaest. et Respons. *p.* 436); St. Austin (Aug. de Div. Dei, *lib.* 18, *cap.* 23), *De Civitate Dei*, has the famous acrostic at large, said to be one of the oracles of the *Sibylla Erythrea*, the first letters of the verses making *Iesus Christos Theou hyios Soter* — *Jesus Christ the Son of God the Saviour*. Divers passages they produce out of those oracles which expressly foretel the coming of the Messiah, his being born of a virgin, his miracles, his sufferings, particularly his being buffeted, spit upon, crowned with thorns, having vinegar and gall given him to drink, etc. Whether these oracles were genuine and authentic or no has been much controverted among the learned. Baronius and the popish writers generally admit and applaud them, and build much upon them; so do some protestant writers; Isaac Vossius has written a great deal to support the reputation of them, and (as I find him quoted by Van Dale) will needs have it that they were formerly a part of the canon of scripture; and a learned prelate of our own nation, Bishop Montague, pleads largely, and with great assurance, for their authority, and is of opinion that some of them were divinely inspired. But many learned men look upon it to be a pious fraud, as they call it, concluding that those verses of the Sibyls which speak so very expressly of Christ and the future state were forged by some Christians and imposed upon the over-credulous. Huetius (Demonstrat. *p.* 748), though of the Romish church, condemns both the ancient and more modern compositions of the Sibyls, and refers his reader, for the proof of their vanity, to the learned Blondel. Van Dale and Gallaeus look upon them to be a forgery. And the truth is they speak so

much more particularly and plainly concerning our Saviour and the future state than any of the prophets of the Old Testament do, that we must conclude St. Paul, who was the apostle of the Gentiles, guilty not only of a very great omission (that in all his preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles, and in all his epistles to the Gentile churches, he never so much as mentions the prophecies of the Sibyls, nor vouches their authority, as he does that of the Old-Testament prophets, in his preaching and writing to the Jews), but likewise of a very great mistake, in making it the particular advantage which the Jews had above the Gentiles that *to them were committed the oracles of God* (~~✠~~Romans 3:1, 2), and that they were the children of the prophets, while he speaks of the Gentiles as sitting in darkness and being afar off. We cannot conceive that heathen women, and those actuated by daemons, should speak more clearly and fully of the Messiah than those holy men did who, we are sure, were moved by the Holy Ghost, nor that the Gentiles should be entrusted with larger and earlier discoveries of the great salvation than that people of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ was to come. But enough, if not more than enough, of the pretenders to prophecy. It is a good remark which the learned Gallaeus makes upon the great veneration which the Romans had for the oracles of the Sibyls, for which he quotes Dionysius Halicarnassaeus, *Ouden oute Romaioi phylattousin, oute hosion ktema oute hieron, hos ta Sibylleia thesphata* — *The Romans preserve nothing with such sacred care, nor do they hold any thing in such high estimation, as the Sibylline oracles. Hi si pro vitreis suis thesauris adeo decertarunt, quid nos pro genuinis nostris, ... Deo inspiratis? — If they had such a value for these counterfeits, how precious should the true treasure of the divine oracles be to us!* Of these we come next to speak.

Prophecy, we are sure, was of equal date with the church; for *faith comes*, not by thinking and seeing, as philosophy does, but by hearing, *by hearing the word of God*, ~~✠~~Romans 10:17. In the antediluvian period Adam received divine revelation in the promise of the Seed of the woman, and no doubt communicated it in the name of the Lord, to his seed, and was prophet, as well as priest, to his numerous family. Enoch was a prophet, and foretold perhaps the deluge, certainly the last judgment, that of the great day. *Behold the Lord comes*, Jude 14. When men began, as a church, to *call upon the name of the Lord* (~~✠~~Genesis 4:26), or to call themselves by his name, they were blessed with prophets, for the *prophecy came in old time* (~~✠~~2 Peter 1:21); it is venerable for its antiquity. When God

renewed his covenant of providence (and that a figure of the covenant of grace) with Noah and his sons, we soon after find Noah, as a prophet, foretelling, not only the servitude of Canaan, but God's enlarging Japhet by Christ, and his dwelling in the tents of Shem, ⁽⁴⁰⁵⁾Genesis 9:26, 27. And when, upon the general revolt of mankind to idolatry (as, in the former period, upon the apostasy of Cain), God distinguished a church for himself by the call of Abraham, and by his covenant with him and his seed, he conferred upon him and the other patriarchs the spirit of prophecy; for, when he reprov'd kings for their sakes, he said, *Touch not my anointed, who have received that unction from the Holy One, and do my prophets no harm,* ⁽⁴⁵⁴⁾Psalms 105:14, 15. And of Abraham he said expressly, *He is a prophet* (⁽⁴⁰⁷⁾Genesis 20:7); and it was with a prophetic eye, as a seer, that *Abraham saw Christ's day* (⁽⁴⁸⁶⁾John 8:56), saw it as so great a distance, and yet with so great an assurance triumphed in it. And Stephen seems to speak of the first settling of a correspondence between him and God, by which he was established to be a prophet, when he says, *The God of glory appeared to him* (⁽⁴⁰²⁾Acts 7:2), appeared in glory. Jacob, upon his death-bed, as a prophet, told his sons *what should befall them in the last days* (⁽⁴⁰¹⁾Genesis 49:1), and spoke very particularly concerning the Messiah.

Hitherto was the infancy of the church, and with it of prophecy; it was the dawning of that day; and that morning-light owed its rise to the Sun of righteousness, though he rose not till long after, but it shone more and more. During the bondage of Israel in Egypt, this, as other glories of the church, was eclipsed; but, as the church made a considerable and memorable advance in the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt and the forming of them into a people, so did the Spirit of prophecy in Moses, the illustrious instrument employed in that great service; and it was by that Spirit that he performed that service; so it is said, ⁽²⁰³⁾Hosea 12:13, *By a prophet the Lord brought Israel out of Egypt, and by a prophet was he preserved* through the wilderness to Canaan, that is, by Moses as a prophet. It appears, by what God said to Aaron, that there were then other prophets among them, to whom God made known himself and his will in dreams and visions (⁽⁴¹⁶⁾Numbers 12:6), but to Moses he spoke in a peculiar manner, *mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches,* ⁽⁴¹⁸⁾Numbers 12:8. Nay, such a plentiful effusion was there of the Spirit of prophecy at that time (because Moses was such a prophet as was to be a type of Christ the great prophet) that some of his Spirit was put upon seventy elders of Israel at once, *and they prophesied,* ⁽⁴¹⁵⁾Numbers

11:25. What they said was extraordinary, and not only under the direction of a prophetic inspiration, but under the constraint of a prophetic impulse, as appears by the case of Eldad and Meded.

When Moses, that great prophet, was laying down his office, he promised Israel that the *Lord God would raise them up a prophet of their brethren like unto him*, ^(~~ORIS~~) Deuteronomy 18:15, 18. In these words, says the learned Bishop Stillingfleet (Orig. Sacr. B. 2, c. 4 — though, in their full and complete sense, they relate to Christ, and to him they are more than once applied in the New Testament), there is included a promise of an order of prophets, which should succeed Moses in the Jewish church, and be the *logia zonta* — *the living oracles* among them (^(~~ORIS~~) Acts 7:38), by which they might know the mind of God; for, in the next words, he lays down rules for the trial of prophets, whether what they said was of God or no, and it is observable that that promise comes in immediately upon an express prohibition of the Pagan rites of divination and the consulting of wizards and familiar spirits: “You shall not need to do that” (said Moses), “for, to your much better satisfaction, you shall have prophets divinely inspired, by whom you may know from God himself both what to do and what to expect.” But as Jacob's dying prophecy concerning the sceptre in Judah, and the lawgiver between his feet, did not begin to be remarkably fulfilled till David's time, most of the Judges being of other tribes, so Moses's promise of a succession of prophets began not to receive its accomplishment till Samuel's time, a little before the other promise began to emerge and operate; and it was an introduction to the other, for it was by Samuel, as a prophet, that David was anointed king, which was an intimation that the prophetic office of our Redeemer should make way, both in the world and in the heart, for his kingly office; and therefore when he was asked, *Art thou a king?* (^(~~ORIS~~) John 18:37) he answered, not evasively, but very pertinently, *I came to bear witness to the truth*, and so to rule as a king purely by the power of truth.

During the government of the Judges there was a pouring out of the Spirit, but more as a Spirit of skill and courage for war than as a Spirit of prophecy. Deborah is indeed called *prophetess*, because of her extraordinary qualifications for judging Israel; but that is the only mention of prophecy, that I remember, in all the book of *Judges*. Extraordinary messages were sent by angels, as to Gideon and Manoah; and it is expressly said that before the word of the Lord came to Samuel (^(~~ORIS~~) 1 Samuel 3:1) it was *precious*, it was very scarce, there was *no open vision*.

And it was therefore with more than ordinary solemnity that the word of the Lord came first to Samuel; and by degrees notice and assurance were given to all Israel *that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord*, ^{<002>}1 Samuel 3:20. In Samuel's time, and by him, the schools of the prophets were erected, by which prophecy was dignified and provision made for a succession of prophets; for it should seem that in those colleges, hopeful young men were bred up in devotion, in a constant attendance upon the instruction the prophets gave from God, and under a strict discipline, as candidates, or probationers, for prophecy, who were called *the sons of the prophets*; and their religious exercises of prayer, conference, and psalmody especially, are called prophesyings; and their praefect, or president, is called *their father*, ^{<002>}1 Samuel 10:12. Out of these God ordinarily chose the prophets he sent; and yet not always: Amos was no prophet nor prophet's son (^{<3074>}Amos 7:14), had not his education in the schools of the prophets, and yet was commissioned to go on God's errands, and (which is observable) though he had not academical education himself, yet he seems to speak of it with great respect when he reckons it among the favours God had bestowed upon Israel that he *raised up of their sons for prophets and of their young men for Nazarites*, ^{<302>}Amos 2:11.

It is worth noting that when the glory of the priesthood was eclipsed by the iniquity of the house of Eli, the desolations of Shiloh, and the obscurity of the ark, there was then a more plentiful effusion of the Spirit of prophecy than had been before; a standing ministry of another kind was thereby erected, and a succession of it kept up. And thus afterwards, in the kingdom of the ten tribes, where there was no legal priesthood at all, yet there were prophets and prophets; sons; in Ahab's time we meet with a hundred of them, whom Obadiah his by *fifty in a cave*, ^{<1894>}1 Kings 18:4. When the people of God, who desired to know his mind, were deprived of one way of instruction, God furnished them with another, and a less ceremonious one; for he left not himself without witness, nor them without a guide. And when they had no temple or altar that they could attend upon with any safety or satisfaction then had private meetings at the prophets' houses, to which the devout faithful worshippers of God resorted (as we find the good Shunamite did, ^{<1323>}2 Kings 4:23), and where they kept their new-moons and their sabbaths, comfortably, and to their edification.

David was himself a prophet; so St. Peter calls him (^{<412>}Acts 2:30); and, though we read not of God's speaking to him by dreams and visions, yet

we are sure that *the Spirit of the Lord spoke by him, and his word was in his tongue* (^{<182>}2 Samuel 23:2), and he had those about him that were seers, that were his seers, as Gad and Iddo, that brought him messages from God, and wrote the history of his times. And now the productions of the Spirit of prophecy were translated into the service of the temple, not only in the model of the house which the Lord made David *understand in writing by his hand upon him* (^{<183>}1 Chronicles 28:19), but in the worship performed there; for there we find Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun, prophesying with harps and other musical instruments, according to the order of the king, not to foretel things to come, but to *give thanks* and to *praise the Lord* (^{<184>}1 Chronicles 25:1-3); yet, in their psalms, they spoke much of Christ and his kingdom, and the glory to be revealed.

In the succeeding reigns, both of Judah and Israel, we frequently meet with prophets sent on particular errands to Rehoboam, Jeroboam, Asa, and other kings, who, it is probable, instructed the people in the things of God at other times, though it is not recorded. But, prophecy growing into contempt with many, God revived the honour of it, and put a new lustre upon it, in the power given to Elijah and Elisha to work miracles, and the great things that God did by them for the confirming of the people's faith in it, and the awakening of their regard to it, (^{<185>}2 Kings 2:3, 4:1, 38; 5:22; 6:1. In their time, and by their agency, it should seem, the schools of the prophets were revived, and we find sons of the prophets, fellows of those sacred colleges, employed in carrying messages to the great men, as to Ahab (^{<186>}1 Kings 20:35), and to Jehu, (^{<187>}2 Kings 9:1.

Hitherto, the prophets of the Lord delivered their messages by word of mouth, only we read of one writing which came from Elijah the prophet to Jehoram king of Israel, (^{<188>}2 Chronicles 21:12. The histories of those times which are left us were compiled by prophets, under a divine direction; and, when the Old Testament is divided into the law and the Prophets, the historical books are, for that reason, reckoned among the prophets. But, in the later times of the kingdoms of Judah and Israel, some of the prophets were divinely inspired to write their prophecies, or abstracts of them, and to leave them upon record, for the benefit of after-ages, that the children who should be born might praise the Lord for them, and, by comparing the event with the prediction, might have their faith confirmed. And, probably, those later prophets spoke more fully and plainly of the Messiah and his kingdom than their predecessors had done, and for that reason their prophecies were put in writing, not only for the encouragement of the

pious Jews that looked for the consolation of Israel, but for the use of us Christians, upon whom the ends of the world have come, as David's psalms had been for the same reason, that the Old Testament and the New might mutually give light and lustre to each other. Many other faithful prophets there were at the same time, who spoke in God's name, who did not commit their prophecies to writing, but were of those whom God sent, rising up betimes and sending them, the contempt of whom, and of their messages, brought ruin without remedy upon that sottish people, that knew not the day of their visitation. In their captivity they had some prophets, some to *show them how long*; and though it was not by a prophet, like Moses, that they were brought out of Babylon, as they had been out of Egypt, but by Joshua the high priest first, and afterwards by Ezra the scribe, to show that God can do his work by ordinary means when he pleases, yet, soon after their return, the Spirit of prophecy was poured out plentifully, and continued (according to the Jews' computation) forty years in the second temple, but ceased in Malachi. Then (say the rabbin) *the Holy Spirit was taken from Israel*, and they had the benefit only of the *Bathkol* — *the daughter of a voice*, that is, a voice from heaven, which they look upon to be the lowest degree of divine revelation. Now herein they are witnesses against themselves for rejecting the true Messiah, for our Lord Jesus, and he only was spoken to by a voice from heaven at his baptism, his transfiguration, and his entrance on his sufferings.

In John the Baptist prophecy revived, and therefore in him the gospel is said to begin, when the church had had no prophets for above 300 years. We have not only the *vox populi* — *the voice of the people* to prove John a prophet, for all the people counted him so, but *vox Dei* — *the voice of God* too; for Christ calls him a prophet, ^{<411>}Matthew 11:9, 10. He had an extraordinary commission from God to call people to repentance, was *filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother's womb*, and was *therefore called the prophet of the Highest*, because he *went before the face of the Lord, to prepare his way* (^{<415>}Luke 1:15, 16); and though he did no miracle, nor gave any sign or wonder, yet this proved him a true prophet, *that all he said of Christ was true*, ^{<416>}John 10:41. Nay, and *this* proved him more than a prophet, than any of the other prophets, that whereas by other prophets Christ was discovered as at a great distance, by him he was discovered as already come, and he was enabled to say, *Behold the Lamb of God*. But after the ascension of our Lord Jesus there was a more plentiful effusion of the Spirit of prophecy than ever before; then was the

promise fulfilled that God would *pour out his Spirit upon all flesh* (and not as hitherto upon the Jews only), and their *sons and their daughters should prophesy*, ^{<406>}Acts 2:16, etc. The gift of tongues was one new product of the Spirit of prophecy, and given for a particular reason, that, the Jewish pale being taken down, all nations might be brought into the church. These and other gifts of prophecy, being for a sign, have long since ceased and laid aside, and we have no encouragement to expect the revival of them; but, on the contrary, are directed to call the scriptures the *more sure word of prophecy*, more sure than voices from heaven; and to them we are directed to *take heed*, to search them, and to hold them fast, ^{<409>}2 Peter 1:19. All God's spiritual Israel know that they are established to be the *oracles of God* (^{<408>}1 Samuel 3:20), and if any add to, or take from, the book of that prophecy, they may read their doom in the close of it; God shall take blessings from them, and add curses to them, ^{<428>}Revelation 22:18, 19).

Now concerning the prophets of the Old Testament, whose writings are before us, observe,

I. That they were all holy men. We are assured by the apostle that *the prophecy came in old time by holy men of God* (and *men of God* they were commonly called, because they were devoted to him), *who spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*. They were men, *subject to like passions as we are* (so Elijah, one of the greatest of them, is said to have been, ^{<417>}James 5:17); but they were holy men, men that in the temper of their minds, and the tenour of their lives, were examples of serious piety. Though there were many pretenders, that, without warrant, said *Thus saith the Lord*, when he sent them not, and some that prophesied in Christ's name, but he never knew them, and they indeed were workers of iniquity (^{<412>}Matthew 7:22, 23), and though the cursing blaspheming lips of Balaam and Caiaphas, even when they actually designed mischief, were over-ruled to speak oracles, yet none were employed and commissioned to speak as prophets but those that had received the Spirit of grace and sanctification; for holiness becomes God's house. The Jewish doctors universally agree in this rule, That the Spirit of prophecy never rests upon any but a holy and wise man, and one whose passions are allayed (see Mr. Smith on Prophecy), or, as others express it, a humble man and a man of fortitude, that is, one that has power to keep his sensual animal part in due subjection to religion and right reason. And some of them (Gemara Schab. c. 2) give this rule, That the Spirit of prophecy does not reside where there

are either, on the one hand, grief and melancholy, or, on the other hand, laughter and lightness of behaviour, and impertinent idle talk: and it is commonly observed by them, both from the musical instruments used in the schools of the prophets in Samuel's time and from the instance of Elisha's calling for a minstrel (~~191~~ 2 Kings 3:15), that the divine presence does not reside with sadness, but with cheerfulness, and Elisha, they say, had not yet recovered himself from the sorrow he conceived at parting with Elijah. They have also a tradition (but I know no ground for it) that all the while Jacob mourned for Joseph, the Shechinah, or Holy Spirit, withdrew from him. Yet I believe that when David intimates that by his sin in the matter of Uriah he had lost the right Spirit, and the free Spirit, ~~251~~ Psalm 51:10, 12 (which therefore he begs might be renewed in him and restored to him), it was not because he was under grief, but because he was under guilt. And therefore, in order to the return of that right and free Spirit, he prays that God would create in him a clean heart.

II. That they had all a full assurance in themselves of their divine mission; and (though they could not always prevail to satisfy others) they were abundantly satisfied themselves that what they delivered as from God, and in his name, was indeed from him; and with the same assurance did the apostles speak of the word of life, as that which they had heard, and seen, and looked on, and which their hands had handled, ~~600~~ 1 John 1:1. Nathan spoke from himself when he encouraged David to build the temple, but afterwards knew he spoke from God when, in his name, he forbade him to do it. God had various ways of making known to his prophets the messages they were to deliver to his people; it should seem, ordinarily, to have been by the ministry of angels. In the Apocalypse Christ is expressly said to have *signified by his angel to his servant John*, ~~600~~ Revelation 1:1. It was sometimes done in a vision when the prophet was awake, sometimes in a dream when the prophet was asleep, and sometimes by a secret but strong impression upon the mind of the prophet. But Maimonides has laid down, as a maxim, That all prophecy makes itself known to the prophet that it is prophecy indeed; that is, says another of the rabbin, By the vigour and liveliness of the perception whereby he apprehends the thing propounded (which Jeremiah intimates when he says, *The word of the Lord was as a fire in my bones*, ~~240~~ Jeremiah 20:9), and therefore they always spoke with great assurance, knowing they should be justified, ~~200~~ Isaiah 1:7.

III. That in their prophesying, both in receiving their message from God and in delivering it to the people, they always kept possession of their own souls. ²⁰⁸Daniel 10:8. Though sometimes their bodily strength was overpowered by the abundance of the revelations, and their eyes were dazzled with the visionary light, as in the instances of Daniel and John (²⁰⁹Revelation 1:17), yet still their understanding remained with them, and the free exercise of their reason. This is excellently well expressed by a learned writer of our own (Smith on Prophecy, p. 190): “The prophetic Spirit, seating itself in the rational powers as well as in the imagination, did never alienate the mind, but inform and enlighten it; and those that were actuated by it always maintained a clearness and consistency of reason, with strength and solidity of judgment. “For” (says he afterwards — Pag. 266) “God did not make use of idiots or fools to reveal his will by, but such whose intellects were entire and perfect; and he imprinted such a clear copy of his truth upon them as that it became their own sense, being digested fully into their understandings, so that they were able to deliver and represent it to others as truly as any can paint forth his own thoughts.” God’s messengers were speaking men, not speaking trumpets. The Fathers frequently took notice of this difference between the prophets of the Lord and the false prophets — that the pretenders to prophecy (who either were actuated by an evil spirit or were under the force of a heated imagination) underwent alienations of mind, and delivered what they had to say in the utmost agitation and disorder, as the Pythian prophetess, who delivered her infernal oracles with many antic gestures, tearing her hair and foaming at the mouth. And by this rule they condemned the Montanists, who pretended to prophecy, in the second century, that what they said was in a way of ecstasy, not like rational men, but like men in a frenzy. Chrysostom (in ²¹⁰1 Corinthians 12:1), having described the furious violent motions of the pretenders to prophecy, adds, *Ho de Prophetes ouch houtos* — *A true prophet does not do so. Sed mente sobrif, et constanti animi staut, et intelligens quae profert, omnia pronunciat* — *He understands what he utters, and utters it soberly and calmly.* And Jerome, in his preface to his Commentaries upon Nahum, observes that it is called *the book of the vision of Nahum. Non enim loquitur en ekstasei, sed est liber intelligentis omnia quae loquitur* — *For he speaks not in an ecstasy, but as one who understands every thing he says.* And again (Prolog. in Habac.), *Non ut amens loquitur propheta, nec in morem insanientium foeminarum dat sine mente sonum* — *The prophet speaks not as an insane person, nor like women wrought into fury, does he utter sound without sense.*

IV. That they all aimed at one and the same thing, which was to bring people to repent of their sins and to return to God and to do their duty to him. This was the errand on which all God messengers were sent, to beat down sin, and to revive and advance serious piety. The burden of every son was, *Turn you now every one from his evil way; amend your ways and your doings, and execute judgment between a man and his neighbour,* ^{<2008>}Jeremiah 7:3, 5. See ^{<3008>}Zechariah 7:8, 9; 8:16. The scope and design of all their prophecies were to enforce the precepts and sanctions of the law of Moses, the moral law, which is of universal and perpetual obligation. Here is nothing of the ceremonial institutes, of the carnal ordinances that were imposed only *till the times of reformation,* ^{<3900>}Hebrews 9:10. Those were now waxing old and ready to vanish away; but they make it their business to press the great and *weighty matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and truth.*

V. That they all bore witness to Jesus Christ and had an eye to him. God raising up the *horn of salvation for us, in the house of his servant David,* was consonant to, and in pursuance of, what *he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets who have been since the world began,* ^{<4008>}Luke 1:69, 70. They prophesied of the grace that should come to us, and it was the Spirit of Christ in them, one and the same Spirit, that testified beforehand the *sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow,* ^{<4010>}1 Peter 1:10, 11. Christ was then made known, and yet comparatively hid, in the predictions of the prophets, as before in the types of the ceremonial law. And the learned Huetius (*Demonstrat. Evang. p. 737*) observes it as really admirable that so many persons, in different ages, should conspire with one consent, as it were, to foretel, some one particular and others another, concerning Christ, all which had, at length, their full accomplishment in him. *Ab ipsis mundi incunabulis, per quatuor annorum millia, uno ore venturum Christum praedixerunt viri complures, in ejusque ortu, vitf, virtutibus, rebus gestis, morte, ac totf denique* *Oikonomia praemonstranda consenserunt* — From the earliest period of time, for 4000 years, a great number of men have predicted the advent of Christ, and presented a harmonious statement of his birth, life, character, actions, and death, and of that economy which he came to establish.

VI. That these prophets were generally hated and abused in their several generations by those that lived with them. Stephen challenges his judges to produce an instance to the contrary: *Which of the prophets have not your*

fathers persecuted? Yea, and, as it should seem, for this reason, because *they showed before of the coming of the Just One*, ^{<41E>}Acts 7:52. Some there were that trembled at the word of God in their mouths, but by the most they were ridiculed and despised, and (as ministers are now by profane people) made a jest of (^{<39E>}Hosea 9:7); the prophet was the fool in the play. *Wherefore came this mad fellow unto thee?* (^{<10E>}2 Kings 9:11) said one of the captains concerning one of the sons of the prophets! The Gentiles never treated their false prophets so ill as the Jews did their true prophets, but, on the contrary, had them always in veneration. The Jews' mocking the messengers of the Lord, killing the prophets, and stoning those that were sent unto them, was as amazing unaccountable an instance of the enmity that is in the carnal mind against God as any that can be produced. And this makes their rejection of Christ's gospel the less strange, that the Spirit of prophecy, which, for many ages, was so much the glory of Israel, in every age met with so much opposition, and there were those that *always resisted the Holy Ghost* in the prophets, and *turned that glory into shame*, ^{<41E>}Acts 7:51. But this was it that was the measure-filling sin of Israel, that brought upon them both their first destruction by the Chaldeans and their final ruin by the Romans, ^{<18E>}2 Chronicles 36:16.

VII. That though men slighted these prophets, God owned them and put honour upon them. As they were men of God, his immediate servants and his messengers, so he always showed himself *the Lord God of the holy prophets* (^{<62E>}Revelation 22:6), stood by them and strengthened them, and by his Spirit they were full of power; and those that slighted them, when they had lost them, were made to know, to their confusion, that *a prophet had been among them*. What was said of one of the primitive fathers of the prophets was true of them all, *The Lord was with them, and did let none of their words fall to the ground*, ^{<08E>}1 Samuel 3:19. What they said by way of warning and encouragement, for the enforcing of their calls to repentance and reformation, was to be understood conditionally. When God spoke by them either, on the one hand, to build and to plant, or, on the other hand, to pluck up and pull down, the change of the people's way might produce a change of God's way (^{<28E>}Jeremiah 18:7-10); such was Jonah's prophecy of Nineveh's ruin within forty days; or God might sometimes be better than his word in granting a reprieve. But what they said by way of prediction of a particular matter, and as a sign, did always come to pass exactly as it was foretold; yea, and the general predictions, sooner or later, took hold even of those that would fain have got clear of them (^{<30E>}Zechariah 1:6); for this

is that which God glories in, that he *confirms the word of his servants* and *performs the counsel of his messengers*, ^{<34B>}Isaiah 44:26.

In the opening these prophecies I have endeavoured to give the genuine sense of them, as far as I could reach it, by consulting the best expositors, considering the scope and coherence, and comparing spiritual things with spiritual, the spiritual things of the Old Testament with those of the New, and especially by prayer to God for the guidance and direction of the Spirit of truth. But, after all, there are many things here *dark and hard to be understood*, concerning the certain meaning of which though I could not gain myself, much less expect to give my reader, full satisfaction, Yet I have not, with the *unlearned and unstable, wrested them* to the destruction of any, ^{<3B>}2 Peter 3:16. It is the prerogative of the *Lamb of God to take this book* and to *open all its seals*. I have likewise endeavoured to accommodate these prophecies to the use and service of those who desire to faith and holiness. And we shall find that whatever is *given by inspiration of God is profitable* (^{<3B>}2 Timothy 3:16), though not all alike profitable, not all alike easy or improvable; but, when the mystery of God shall be finished, we shall see, what we are now bound to believe, that there is not one idle word in all the prophecies of this book. What God has said, as well as what he does, *we know not now, but we shall know hereafter*.

The pleasure I have had in studying and meditating upon those parts of these prophecies which are plain and practical, and especially those which are evangelical, has been an abundant balance to, and recompence for, the harder tasks we have met with in other parts that are more obscure. In many parts of this field the treasure must be dug for, as that in the mines; but in other parts the surface is covered with rich and precious products, with corn, and flocks, of which we may say, as was said of Noah, These same have comforted us greatly concerning our work and the toil of our hands, and have made it very pleasant and delightful; God grant it may be no less so to the readers!

And now let me desire the assistance of my friends, in setting up my Ebenezer here, in a thankful acknowledgment that hitherto the Lord has helped me. I desire to praise God that he has spared my life to finish the Old Testament, and has graciously given me some tokens of his presence with me in carrying this work, though the more I reflect upon myself the more unworthy I see myself of the honour of being thus employed, and the more

need I see of Christ and his merit and grace. *Remember me, O my God! for good, and spare me according to the multitude of thy mercies.* The Lord forgive what is mine, and accept what is his own!

I purpose, if God continue my life and health, according to the measure of the grace given to me, and in a constant and entire dependence upon divine strength, to go through the New Testament in two volumes more. I intimated in my preface to the first volume that I had drawn up some expositions upon some parts of the New Testament; namely, The gospels of St. Matthew and St. John; but they are so large that, to make them bear some proportion to the rest, it is necessary that they be much contracted, so that I shall be obliged to write them all over again, and to make considerable alterations, and therefore I cannot expect they should be published but as these hitherto have been, if God permit, a volume every other year. I shall begin it now shortly, if the Lord will, and apply myself to it as closely as I can; and I earnestly desire the prayers of all that wish well to that undertaking that, if the Lord spare me to go on with it, I may be enabled to do it well, and so as that by it some may be led into the *riches of the full assurance of understanding in the mystery of God, even of the Father and of Christ,* <sup>Colossians 2:2. And, if it shall please God to remove me by death before it be finished, I trust I shall be able to say not only, Welcome his blessed will, but, Welcome that blessed world, in which, though now we *know in part, and prophesy but in part, that knowledge which is perfect will come, and that which is partial will be done away* (<sup>1 Corinthians 13:8-10, 12), in which all our mistakes will be rectified, all our doubts resolved, all our deficiencies made up, all our endeavours in preaching, catechising, and expounding, superseded and rendered useless, and all our prayers swallowed up in everlasting praises, — in which prophecy, now so much admired, shall fail, and tongues shall cease, and the knowledge we have now shall vanish away, as the light of the morning-star does when the sun has risen, — in which we shall no longer see through a glass darkly, but face to face. In a believing, comfortable, well-grounded, expectation of that true and perfect light, I desire to continue, living and dying; in a humble and diligent preparation for it let me spend my time, and in the full enjoyment of it Oh that I may spend a glorious eternity!

July 18, 1712.

M.H.