

The development of the Messianic idea continually underwent changes or modifications, as one generation after another passed away. According to Riehm, whose remarks again are exceedingly pertinent and appropriate, these modifications were chiefly owing to three great causes. The variety in the form of Messianic prophecy was due, he says in substance, partly to the mental peculiarities and particular religious position of the various prophets themselves, partly to the gradual progress of the revelation of God's purposes, and partly, but in much greater measure, to the limiting and controlling influence exercised upon Messianic prophecy by contemporary historical circumstances. From each of these generic causes, modifications in Messianic statements and conceptions would naturally and inevitably arise.

Although it is not the purpose of this discussion to consider these causes at length, it may be worth observing that one special feature of every prophet's mission was to influence the nation to be what he believed Jehovah desired it to be, in order that it might become what he declared Jehovah designed it to become. Both the earlier and the later prophets labored for the maintenance of the true religion in Israel. For the accomplishment of this purpose, they pursued that course which they thought was best calculated to reach the end in view. They adopted such terms and employed such images as they considered were best suited to the nation's circumstances, that is, such terms and images as seemed to them best adapted to impress their contemporaries, and thus to secure the desired result.

Hence an essential part of the majority of prophetic utterances, on the part of the great canonical prophets, consisted of Messianic representation. There is a constant variation, though, in the form which the representation takes. Almost every picture of Messianic times has its own peculiar coloring, the details of the picture differing according to the personality of the prophet, the condition of the people, and the circumstances of the age. Changed historical relations suggested changed prophetic representations, which were modified to suit the condition of the nation at that particular period of its life. At one time