

priest, saying, thus speaketh the Lord of Hosts saying, these people say the time has not come, the time that the Lord's house shall be built." In these verses every question of date, authorship, occasion, and purpose is answered definitely. There are very many such cases.

Sometimes the scripture passage contains indications which seem to be clear, but upon close investigation it is discovered that difficulties of a more or less serious character exist; for example, "In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, came Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylonia, unto Jerusalem and besieged it," and then follows the account of the capture of Daniel and his companions; but the exact date is, to say the least, doubtful in view of another chronological statement contained in Jer. xxv. 1. The initial phrase of Ecclesiastes, "The words of the preacher, the son of David, king of Jerusalem," would seem most definitely to point to Solomon as the author of that book, but the evidence of a different kind found in the book itself is so great that another interpretation must be given these words.

In still other cases the book may be entirely devoid of any statement which will throw light upon its date, or give us any particulars concerning its author; for example, the Book of Joel which is assigned by different commentators to almost every century from the earliest to the latest of biblical history; containing here and there allusions to historical conditions, but allusions so indefinite that they may be used to favor any one of half a dozen theories. It is, nevertheless, the book itself from which the most valuable material is obtained.

This material is of various kinds. (a) A close study of the diction of the writer will often tell whether he was from northern or southern Israel, whether he labored in Palestine or as a captive in Babylonia, whether he belonged to the early period of the nation's life or to the later period when Persian words and often Greek words were becoming a part of the vocabulary. An examination of his style will often indicate whether he was a poet or a writer of ordinary prose; whether he was country born or city bred; whether he belonged to the age of strong, forcible, vivid expression, or to that later time when wearying