

It reads, "Concerning which salvation the prophets sought and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that *should come* unto you; searching what *time*, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ which was in them did point unto, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that should follow them."

The ancient prophets did not publish unintelligible mysteries which they could not comprehend. While the details of the manner and time of their realization were necessarily obscure, the meaning and bearing of their prophecies were perfectly plain. One may admit that a prophetic statement has a wider application than the prophet who uttered it was aware, but one must not assume that he did not understand what his own statement meant. He certainly understood the natural and legitimate meaning which it contained, and which he consciously intended it to convey. In this respect, the pregnant utterances of a prophet were similar to the profound sentiments of a poet. They sometimes possessed a significance greater than he supposed, and were capable of applications broader than he dreamed.

Hence we may say of both a prophet and a poet that he was wiser than he knew, because his teaching sets forth truths or principles of wider application than he knew; but in neither case should we say that the prophet or the poet had not a perfectly intelligent comprehension of what he taught. Loosely speaking, the contents of prophecy, like the contents of poetry, embrace both their conscious and their unconscious signification, both their present and their future application; but, strictly speaking, the contents in each case embrace only the things of which the prophet or the poet was personally conscious at the time of their delivery. In ascertaining the import of prophecy, therefore, we must endeavor to discover its critical meaning in the latter sense of the term.

The difficulty of interpreting Old Testament prophecy has been enormously increased by the seeking of special references on the part of biassed scholars, without due regard to their historical connection. For this reason, Messianic references have been found in almost numberless cases where another reference