

not : What was the precise thought of the Prophet ? He may have dreamed of an apocalyptic appearance of the Messiah—his literal coming on the visible clouds. The question rather is : How did Jesus interpret the prophecy in applying it to himself ? The obvious sense of the writer is not to determine our interpretation of prophecy. Malachi, for instance, predicted the coming of Elijah before the appearance of the Christ. The "obvious sense" of the prophet is the literal appearance of the historic Elijah, and so his readers understood him. But Jesus points to John the Baptist, saying : This is Elijah which was to come. He interpreted Malachi as predicting *an* Elijah rather than Elijah himself, and he saw in the Baptist the spiritual fulfilment of the prophet's words (18). Similarly, his apocalyptic appearance on the clouds of heaven was one of the distinctive notes of the Messianic Advent, according to Daniel ; and when Jesus applied this to himself, it may have indicated nothing more than his claim to be the Messiah. We must not interpret Jesus' language as if it were written for Western minds in the nineteenth century. His teaching comes to us in Hebrew dress ; we must not mistake this national costume for the livery of heaven. He used the highly rhetorical symbolism which was, which should have been, at least, quite intelligible to his hearers. We should certainly interpret many Old Testament prophecies of the Messianic Coming as pointing clearly to a cataclysmic event, but did Christ so understand them ? Nay, did the Hebrew mind generally so understand them ? The prophets made use of bold imagery borrowed from the natural world, to typify judgments upon Egypt, Babylon, Edom and the rest. These judgments passed into history, without the occurrence of the sublime and appalling natural phenomena which were predicted. The fulfilment seems quite unworthy of the prophecy ; but this was no stumbling block to the prophet. He left his imagery on record, quite unconscious, apparently, that it would offend those who were the

(18). Malachi 4 : 5-6 and Matthew 11 : 14.