

which they conceive had now lasted for that space of time. But as the Divine patience and long suffering were manifested towards this people for a much longer season, it is highly probable that this period of three years may denote, the three different kinds of administration, under which this people were successively placed. Their subjection to the immediate government of Jehovah, commonly termed their Theocracy, was the first of these years, extending from their deliverance out of Egypt to the commencement of the reign of Saul. Their monarchy may be considered as the second year, beginning with the reign of Saul, and extending to the departure of the sceptre from Judah at the birth of Christ; and their submission to the galling yoke of the Romans may be viewed as the third year, stretching from the departure of the sceptre from Judah to the destruction of the city and temple of Jerusalem. During all these different periods, the Lord was gracious and merciful to the Jews. He preserved them in a national state, and supplied them with those ordinances of religion which had a tendency to promote their spiritual instruction and edification. He gave unto them space to repent of their sins, but they repented not. "Behold," says he, "I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes; and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar."*

In the course of the last period, when the Messiah himself was the dresser of the vineyard, the Jews were still like a barren fig-tree, professing a strict adherence to the precepts of the Mosaic law, and attending regularly upon the external ordinances of the

* Matt. xxiii. 34, 35.