

plete Old or New Testament for his topic—he finds that his task is a two-sided one everywhere and always. His exposition is perpetually illustrating what we may call the order of revelation and the order of Providence. To present one of these aspects of the divine working without the other is more than a mere defeat; it is a serious injury and loss. To express the same idea more formally, we may say that to make biblical exposition exclusively doctrinal and ethical is bad homiletics. It must also be in the truest sense of the word historical, if it is to be either faithful or duly effective. It is mainly this historical aspect of revelation which is illustrated by Oriental discoveries.

The Bible, especially the Old Testament, is full of history; that is, of objective facts of wide and enduring significance. The Old Testament revelation, indeed, is cast in a framework of narrative, of more than mere personal or local interest; and what is not directly descriptive or commemorative is full of historical allusion. We may therefore assume antecedently that much of what is of a practical hortatory or ethical nature can only be fully appreciated in the light of the events and the circumstances which were the outward occasions of the revelation; that even God Himself divests Himself of His garments of thick darkness in conditions of time and place; and as we apprehend Him only through His ways to men, so we must needs pay very earnest heed to those times and places in which He, that is, His truth, has been revealed. The gist of the matter is, in a word, to be a good biblical preacher one must be an exegete; to be a good exegete, one must be a historian.

Inductive proof of the validity of this position in the region of Oriental research abounds on every side. A single concrete illustration may suffice to clear the way. It shall be taken from the most instructive and spacious field of prophecy. A prophecy is an historical event, and has to be timed, placed, and circumstanced before it can be understood or utilized. But every prophecy is a disclosure of God's will concerning man. If it is a statement of what men should do, it is a moral and religious truth. If it is an announcement of what they will do or of what is to be done on their account, it is what we call from the human side history, and from the divine side Providence. Now in any given case these elements are found to be inseparably linked together. We read, for example, in Isa. x. 5: "Wo to Assyria, the God of mine anger! in whose hand as a staff is my indignation." The rest of the chapter unfolds the wide historical and providential perspective of which this text is the open gateway. Two nationalities are here involved, in each of which the supreme Ruler of the nations has deep concern. One of them is the great Assyrian power. It is now supreme in the civilized world. Its supremacy has been gained by force, skilfully organized and steadily exerted as never before in the earth's history. The smaller kingdoms, east and west, go down before it singly or allied, with or without resistance. Israel, one of the lesser Western states, is becoming surely its prey. Upon Israel Assyria is to work its will, almost to complete destruction (ver. 6). With dramatic vividness the great king, Sennacherib, is made to set forth the policy and might of his empire. He claims invincible and unlimited power. And it would seem as if he does so of right. For who could stay the force of his onset? Or what god could deliver Jerusalem out of his hand? So any common-sense observer of the time would have said. But the situation was grasped by one man who was something more than a common-sense observer. He belonged to the weak and prostrate nation. And yet, as a statesman and patriot, he declared that its fate was a well-deserved punishment, which divine justice was meting out by the hand of the Assyrian oppressor. Singular also was his judgment of Assyria itself. That puissant monarchy was now at the summit of its power. Palestine was fairly within its grasp. Jerusalem, the last great stronghold of the West-land, was apparently about to fall before his triumphantly advancing troops (ver. 28 f.). Egypt alone remained unsubdued. But any one