

Jerusalem the Lord commits the punishment of the chosen people to seventy shepherds, who are told which to kill and how many, at the same time intimating that they will exceed their commission and destroy many more than the appointed number. These seventy shepherds are divided into four series, consisting respectively of 12, 23, 23, 12 members. The last of these members would bring us to the author's own time. Can we with any probability elucidate this riddle? The explanations have been as numerous as the commentators, and we might easily refute their theories by simply comparing one with the other. Out of the confusion thus created we may thank Dillmann and Ewald for delivering us. They and others¹ have seen that an attempt was here made to give a new interpretation to the seventy years of which Jeremiah had spoken as the period of the Captivity, and which had not been followed by that complete restoration which had been anticipated. Here-upon the literal exposition was surrendered; and another theory was started which would account for the partial failure and point to its remedy. The seventy shepherds are foreign and heathen rulers, represented in the prophets as seventy weeks; and they continue to oppress the chosen people till overcome by the great horn, whose victories herald the advent of the Messiah. There is great difficulty in defining the seventy rulers, and it is only with much accommodation that history can be forced into agreement with the writer's supposed idea. Hence it has been proposed to see in these shepherds, not kings, but angels appointed to superintend the chastisement of Israel at the hands of her enemies. As Drummond points out, these shepherds receive their commission at the same time, which would hardly have been the case had they represented successive monarchs.² If, however, we hold the usual interpretation of the vision, we must explain it in the following way:—The first group of twelve shepherds comprises five Assyrian kings, three Chaldæan and four Egyptian, from Necho II. to Amasis, under whom, more

¹ Especially Drummond and Stanton.

² See chap. lxxxvii. 2. Drummond, p. 40.