THE JOHN CALVIN BIBLE COMMENTARIES

JEREMIAH 10-19

Commentaries On Jeremiah 10- 19 John Calvin

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John Calvin - A Biography

By William Barry

This man, undoubtedly the greatest of Protestant divines, and perhaps, after St. Augustine, the most perseveringly followed by his disciples of any Western writer on theology, was born at Noyon in Picardy, France, 10 July, 1509, and died at Geneva, 27 May, 1564.

A generation divided him from Luther, whom he never met. By birth, education, and temper these two protagonists of the reforming movement were strongly contrasted. Luther was a Saxon peasant, his father a miner; Calvin sprang from the French middle-class, and his father, an attorney, had purchased the freedom of the City of Noyon, where he practised civil and canon law. Luther entered the Order of Augustinian Hermits, took a monk's vows, was made a priest and incurred much odium by marrying a nun. Calvin never was ordained in the Catholic Church; his training was chiefly in law and the humanities; he took no vows. Luther's eloquence made him popular by its force, humour, rudeness, and vulgar style. Calvin spoke to the learned at all times, even when preaching before multitudes. His manner is classical; he reasons on system; he has little humour; instead of striking with a cudgel he uses the weapons of a deadly logic and persuades by a teacher's authority, not by a demagogue's calling of names. He writes French as well as Luther writes German, and like him has been reckoned a pioneer in the modern development of his native tongue. Lastly, if we term the doctor of Wittenberg a mystic, we may sum up Calvin as a scholastic; he gives articulate expression to the principles which Luther had stormily thrown out upon the world in his vehement pamphleteering; and the "Institutes" as they were left by their author have remained ever since the standard of orthodox Protestant belief in all the Churches known as "Reformed." His French disciples called their sect "the religion"; such it has proved to be outside the Roman world.

The family name, spelt in many ways, was Cauvin latinized according to the custom of the age as Calvinus. For some unknown reason the Reformer is commonly called Maître Jean C. His mother, Jeanne Le Franc, born in the Diocese of Cambrai, is mentioned as "beautiful and devout"; she took her little son to various shrines and brought him up a good Catholic. On the father's side, his ancestors were seafaring

men. His grandfather settled at Pont l'Evêque near Paris, and had two sons who became locksmiths: the third was Gerard, who turned procurator at Novon, and there his four sons and two daughters saw the light. He lived in the Place au Blé (Cornmarket). Novon, a bishop's see, had long been a fief of the powerful old family of Hangest, who treated it as their personal property. But an everlasting quarrel, in which the city took part, went on between the bishop and the chapter. Charles de Hangest, nephew of the too wellknown Georges d'Amboise, Archbishop of Rouen, surrendered the bishopric in 1525 to his own nephew John, becoming his vicar-general. John kept up the battle with his canons until the Parliament of Paris intervened, upon which he went to Rome, and at last died in Paris in 1577. This prelate had Protestant kinsfolk; he is charged with having fostered heresy which in those years was beginning to raise its head among the French. Clerical dissensions, at all events, allowed the new doctrines a promising field; and the Calvins were more or less infected by them before 1530.

Gerard's four sons were made clerics and held benefices at a tender age. The Reformer was given one when a boy of twelve, he became Curé of Saint-Martin de Marteville in the Vermandois in 1527, and of Pont l'Eveque in 1529. Three of the boys attended the local Collège des Capettes, and there John proved himself an apt scholar. But his people were intimate with greater folk, the de Montmor, a branch of the line of Hangest, which led to his accompanying some of their children to Paris in 1523, when his mother was probably dead and his father had married again. The latter died in 1531, under excommunication from the chapter for not sending in his accounts. The old man's illness, not his lack of honesty, was, we are told, the cause. Yet his son Charles, nettled by the censure, drew towards the Protestant doctrines. He

was accused in 1534 of denying the Catholic dogma of the Eucharist, and died out of the Church in 1536; his body was publicly gibbeted as that of a recusant.

Meanwhile, young John was going through his own trials at the University of Paris, the dean or syndic of which, Noel Bédier, had stood up against Erasmus and bore hard upon Le Fèvre d'Etaples (Stapulensis), celebrated for his translation of the Bible into French. Calvin, a "martinet", or oppidan, in the Collèege de la Marche, made this man's acquaintance (he was from Picardy) and may have glanced into his Latin commentary on St. Paul, dated 1512, which Doumerque considers the first Protestant book emanating from a French pen. Another influence tending the same way was that of Corderius, Calvin's tutor, to whom he dedicated afterwards his annotation of I Thessalonians, remarking, "if there be any good thing in what I have published, I owe it to you". Corderius had an excellent Latin style, his life was austere, and his "Colloquies" earned him enduring fame. But he fell under suspicion of heresy, and by Calvin's aid took refuge in Geneva, where he died September 1564. A third herald of the "New Learning" was George Cop, physician to Francis I, in whose house Calvin found a welcome and gave ear to the religious discussions which Cop favoured. And a fourth was Pierre-Robert d'Olivet of Noyon, who also translated the Scriptures, our youthful man of letters, his nephew, writing (in 1535) a Latin preface to the Old Testament and a French one — his first appearance as a native author — to the New Testament.

By 1527, when no more than eighteen, Calvin's education was complete in its main lines. He had learned to be a humanist and a reformer. The "sudden conversion" to a spiritual life in 1529, of which he speaks, must not be taken quite literally. He had never been an ardent Catholic; but

the stories told at one time of his ill-regulated conduct have no foundation; and by a very natural process he went over to the side on which his family were taking their stand. In 1528 he inscribed himself at Orléans as a law student, made friends with Francis Daniel, and then went for a year to Bourges, where he began preaching in private. Margaret d'Angoulême, sister of Francis I, and Duchess of Berry, was living there with many heterodox Germans about her.

He is found again at Paris in 1531. Wolmar had taught him Greek at Bourges; from Vatable he learned Hebrew; and he entertained some relations with the erudite Budaeus. About this date he printed a commentary on Seneca's "De Clementiâ". It was merely an exercise in scholarship, having no political significance. Francis I was, indeed, handling Protestants severely, and Calvin, now Doctor of Law at Orléans, composed, so the story runs, an oration on Christian philosophy which Nicholas Cop delivered on All Saints' Day, 1532, both writer and speaker having to take instant flight from pursuit by the royal inquisitors. This legend has been rejected by modern critics. Calvin spent some time, however, with Canon du Tillet at Angoulême under a feigned designation. In May, 1534, he went to Novon, gave up his benefice, and, it is said, was imprisoned. But he got away to Nerac in Bearn, the residence of the Duchess Margaret, and there again encountered Le Fèvre, whose French Bible had been condemned by the Sorbonne to the flames. His next visit to Paris fell out during a violent campaign of the Lutherans against the Mass, which brought on reprisals, Etienne de la Forge and others were burnt in the Place de Grève; and Calvin accompanied by du Tillet, escaped — though not without adventures — to Metz and Strasburg. In the latter city Bucer reigned supreme. The leading reformers dictated laws from the pulpit to their adherents, and this journey proved a decisive one for the French humanist,

who, though by nature timid and shy, committed himself to a war on paper with his own sovereign. The famous letter to Francis I is dated 23 August, 1535. It served as a prologue to the "Institutes", of which the first edition came out in March, 1536, not in French but in Latin. Calvin's apology for lecturing the king was, that placards denouncing the Protestants as rebels had been posted up all over the realm. Francis I did not read these pages, but if he had done so he would have discovered in them a plea, not for toleration, which the Reformer utterly scorned, but for doing away with Catholicism in favour of the new gospel. There could be only one true Church, said the young theologian, therefore kings ought to make an utter end of popery. (For an account of the "Institutes" see) The second edition belongs to 1539, the first French translation to 1541; the final Latin, as revised by its author, is of 1559; but that in common use, dated 1560, has additions by his disciples. "It was more God's work than mine", said Calvin, who took for his motto "Omnia ad Dei gloriam", and in allusion to the change he had undergone in 1529 assumed for his device a hand stretched out from a burning heart.

A much disputed chapter in Calvin's biography is the visit which he was long thought to have paid at Ferraro to the Protestant Duchess Renée, daughter of Louis XII. Many stories clustered about his journey, now given up by the best-informed writers. All we know for certain is that the Reformer, after settling his family affairs and bringing over two of his brothers and sisters to the views he had adopted undertook, in consequence of the war between Charles V and Francis I, to reach Bale by way of Geneva, in July, 1536. At Geneva the Swiss preacher Fare, then looking for help in his propaganda, besought him with such vehemence to stay and teach theology that, as Calvin himself relates, he was terrified into submission. We are not accustomed to fancy the austere prophet so easily frightened. But as a

student and recluse new to public responsibilities, he may well have hesitated before plunging into the troubled waters of Geneva, then at their stormiest period. No portrait of him belonging to this time is extant. Later he is represented as of middle height, with bent shoulders, piercing eyes, and a large forehead; his hair was of an auburn tinge. Study and fasting occasioned the severe headaches from which he suffered continually. In private life he was cheerful but sensitive, not to say overbearing, his friends treated him with delicate consideration. His habits were simple; he cared nothing for wealth, and he never allowed himself a holiday. His correspondence, of which 4271 letters remain, turns chiefly on doctrinal subjects. Yet his strong, reserved character told on all with whom he came in contact; Geneva submitted to his theocratic rule, and the Reformed Churches accepted his teaching as though it were infallible.

Such was the stranger whom Farel recommended to his fellow Protestants, "this Frenchman", chosen to lecture on the Bible in a city divided against itself. Geneva had about 15,000 inhabitants. Its bishop had long been its prince limited, however, by popular privileges. The vidomne, or mayor, was the Count of Savoy, and to his family the bishopric seemed a property which, from 1450, they bestowed on their younger children. John of Savoy, illegitimate son of the previous bishop, sold his rights to the duke, who was head of the clan, and died in 1519 at Pignerol. Jean de la Baume, last of its ecclesiastical princes, abandoned the city, which received Protestant teachers from Berne in 1519 and from Fribourg in 1526. In 1527 the arms of Savoy were torn down; in 1530 the Catholic party underwent defeat, and Geneva became independent. It had two councils, but the final verdict on public measures rested with the people. These appointed Farel, a convert of Le Fevre, as their preacher in 1534. A discussion between

the two Churches from 30 May to 24 June, 1535 ended in victory for the Protestants. The altars were desecrated, the sacred images broken, the Mass done away with. Bernese troops entered and "the Gospel" was accepted, 21 May, 1536. This implied persecution of Catholics by the councils which acted both as Church and State. Priests were thrown into prison; citizens were fined for not attending sermons. At Zürich, Basle, and Berne the same laws were established. Toleration did not enter into the ideas of the time.

But though Calvin had not introduced this legislation, it was mainly by his influence that in January, 1537 the "articles" were voted which insisted on communion four times a year, set spies on delinguents, established a moral censorship, and punished the unruly with excommunication. There was to be a children's catechism, which he drew up; it ranks among his best writings. The city now broke into "jurants" and "nonjurors" for many would not swear to the "articles"; indeed, they never were completely accepted. Questions had arisen with Berne touching points that Calvin judged to be indifferent. He made a figure in the debates at Lausanne defending the freedom of Geneva. But disorders ensued at home, where recusancy was yet rife; in 1538 the council exiled Farel, Calvin, and the blind evangelist, Couraud. The Reformer went to Strasburg, became the guest of Capito and Bucer, and in 1539 was explaining the New Testament to French refugees at fifty two florins a year. Cardinal Sadolet had addressed an open letter to the Genevans, which their exile now answered. Sadolet urged that schism was a crime; Calvin replied that the Roman Church was corrupt. He gained applause by his keen debating powers at Hagenau, Worms, and Ratisbon. But he complains of his poverty and ill-health, which did not prevent him from marrying at this time Idelette de Bure, the widow of an Anabaptist whom he

had converted. Nothing more is known of this lady, except that she brought him a son who died almost at birth in 1542, and that her own death took place in 1549.

After some negotiation Ami Perrin, commissioner for Geneva, persuaded Calvin to return. He did so, not very willingly, on 13 September, 1541. His entry was modest enough. The church constitution now recognized "pastors, doctors, elders, deacons" but supreme power was given to the magistrate. Ministers had the spiritual weapon of God's word; the consistory never, as such, wielded the secular arm Preachers, led by Calvin, and the councils, instigated by his opponents, came frequently into collision. Yet the ordinances of 1541 were maintained; the clergy, assisted by lay elders, governed despotically and in detail the actions of every citizen. A presbyterian Sparta might be seen at Geneva; it set an example to later Puritans, who did all in their power to imitate its discipline. The pattern held up was that of the Old Testament, although Christians were supposed to enjoy Gospel liberty. In November, 1552, the Council declared that Calvin's "Institutes" were a "holy doctrine which no man might speak against." Thus the State issued dogmatic decrees, the force of which had been anticipated earlier, as when Jacques Gouet was imprisoned on charges of impiety in June, 1547, and after severe torture was beheaded in July. Some of the accusations brought against the unhappy young man were frivolous, others doubtful. What share, if any, Calvin took in this judgment is not easy to ascertain. The execution of however must be laid at his door; it has given greater offence by far than the banishment of Castellio or the penalties inflicted on Bolsec — moderate men opposed to extreme views in discipline and doctrine, who fell under suspicion as reactionary. The Reformer did not shrink from his self-appointed task. Within five years fifty-eight sentences of death and seventy-six of exile, besides

numerous committals of the most eminent citizens to prison, took place in Geneva. The iron yoke could not be shaken off. In 1555, under Ami Perrin, a sort of revolt was attempted. No blood was shed, but Perrin lost the day, and Calvin's theocracy triumphed.

"I am more deeply scandalized", wrote Gibbon "at the single execution of Servetus than at the hecatombs which have blazed in the autos-da-fé of Spain and Portugal". He ascribes the enmity of Calvin to personal malice and perhaps envy. The facts of the case are pretty well ascertained. Born in 1511, perhaps at Tudela, Michael Served y Reves studied at Toulouse and was present in Bologna at the coronation of Charles V. He travelled in Germany and brought out in 1531 at Hagenau his treatise "De Trinitatis Erroribus", a strong Unitarian work which made much commotion among the more orthodox Reformers. He met Calvin and disputed with him at Paris in 1534, became corrector of the press at Lyons; gave attention to medicine, discovered the lesser circulation of the blood, and entered into a fatal correspondence with the dictator of Geneva touching a new volume "Christianismi Restitutio," which he intended to publish. In 1546 the exchange of letters ceased. The Reformer called Servetus arrogant (he had dared to criticize the "Institutes" in marginal glosses), and uttered the significant menace, "If he comes here and I have any authority, I will never let him leave the place alive." The "Restitutio" appeared in 1553. Calvin at once had its author delated to the Dominican inquisitor Ory at Lyons, sending on to him the man's letters of 1545-46 and these glosses. Hereupon the Spaniard was imprisoned at Vienne, but he escaped by friendly connivance, and was burnt there only in effigy. Some extraordinary fascination drew him to Geneva, from which he intended to pass the Alps. He arrived on 13 August, 1553. The next day Calvin, who had remarked him at the

sermon, got his critic arrested, the preacher's own secretary coming forward to accuse him. Calvin drew up forty articles of charge under three heads, concerning the nature of God, infant baptism, and the attack which Servetus had ventured on his own teaching. The council hesitated before taking a deadly decision, but the dictator, reinforced by Farel, drove them on. In prison the culprit suffered much and loudly complained. The Bernese and other Swiss voted for some indefinite penalty. But to Calvin his power in Geneva seemed lost, while the stigma of heresy; as he insisted, would cling to all Protestants if this innovator were not put to death. "Let the world see" Bullinger counselled him, "that Geneva wills the glory of Christ."

Accordingly, sentence was pronounced 26 October, 1553, of burning at the stake. "Tomorrow he dies," wrote Calvin to Farel. When the deed was done, the Reformer alleged that he had been anxious to mitigate the punishment, but of this fact no record appears in the documents. He disputed with Servetus on the day of execution and saw the end. A defence and apology next year received the adhesion of the Genevan ministers. Melanchthon, who had taken deep umbrage at the blasphemies of the Spanish Unitarian, strongly approved in well-known words. But a group that included Castellio published at Basle in 1554 a pamphlet with the title, "Should heretics be persecuted?" It is considered the first plea for toleration in modern times. Beza replied by an argument for the affirmative, couched in violent terms; and Calvin, whose favorite disciple he was, translated it into French in 1559. The dialogue, "Vaticanus", written against the "Pope of Geneva" by Castellio, did not get into print until 1612. Freedom of opinion, as Gibbon remarks, "was the consequence rather than the design of the Reformation."

Another victim to his fiery zeal was Gentile, one of an Italian sect in Geneva, which also numbered among its adherents Alciati and Gribaldo. As more or less Unitarian in their views, they were required to sign a confession drawn up by Calvin in 1558. Gentile subscribed it reluctantly, but in the upshot he was condemned and imprisoned as a perjurer. He escaped only to be twice incarcerated at Berne, where in 1566, he was beheaded. Calvin's impassioned polemic against these Italians betrays fear of the Socinianism which was to lay waste his vineyard. Politically he leaned on the French refugees, now abounding in the city, and more than equal in energy — if not in numbers — to the older native factions. Opposition died out. His continual preaching, represented by 2300 sermons extant in the manuscripts and a vast correspondence, gave to the Reformer an influence without example in his closing years. He wrote to Edward VI, helped in revising the Book of Common Prayer, and intervened between the rival English parties abroad during the Marian period. In the Huguenot troubles he sided with the more moderate. His censure of the conspiracy of Amboise in 1560 does him honour. One great literary institution founded by him, the College, afterwards the University, of Geneva, flourished exceedingly. The students were mostly French. When Beza was rector it had nearly 1500 students of various grades.

Geneva now sent out pastors to the French congregations and was looked upon as the Protestant Rome. Through Knox, "the Scottish champion of the Swiss Reformation", who had been preacher to the exiles in that city, his native land accepted the discipline of the Presbytery and the doctrine of predestination as expounded in Calvin's "Institutes". The Puritans in England were also descendants of the French theologian. His dislike of theatres, dancing and the amenities of society was fully shared by them. The

town on Lake Leman was described as without crime and destitute of amusements. Calvin declaimed against the "Libertines", but there is no evidence that any such people had a footing inside its walls The cold, hard, but upright disposition characteristic of the Reformed Churches, less genial than that derived from Luther, is due entirely to their founder himself. Its essence is a concentrated pride, a love of disputation, a scorn of opponents. The only art that it tolerates is music, and that not instrumental. It will have no Christian feasts in its calendar, and it is austere to the verge of Manichaean hatred of the body. When dogma fails the Calvinist, he becomes, as in the instance of Carlyle, almost a pure Stoic. "At Geneva, as for a time in Scotland," says J. A. Froude, "moral sins were treated as crimes to be punished by the magistrate." The Bible was a code of law, administered by the clergy. Down to his dying day Calvin preached and taught. By no means an aged man, he was worn out in these frequent controversies. On 25 April, 1564, he made his will, leaving 225 French crowns, of which he begueathed ten to his college, ten to the poor, and the remainder to his nephews and nieces. His last letter was addressed to Farel. He was buried without pomp, in a spot which is not now ascertainable. In the year 1900 a monument of expiation was erected to Servetus in the Place Champel. Geneva has long since ceased to be the head of Calvinism. It is a rallying point for Free Thought, Socialist propaganda, and Nihilist conspiracies. But in history it stands out as the Sparta of the Reformed churches, and Calvin is its Lycurgus.

COMMENTARIES ON JEREMIAH 10- 19

CHAPTER 10

Jeremiah 10:1-2

- Hear ye the word which the Lord speaketh unto you, O house of
 Israel;
 Audite verbum quod loquitur (sermonem quem profert)
 Jehova ad vos, domus Israel:
- 2. Thus saith the Lord, Learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them.2. Sic dicit Jehova, Viam gentium ne didiceritis, et a signis coelorum ne metuatis; quoniam metuant ab illis gentes.

Jeremiah enters here on a new subject. Though he had, no doubt, taught this truth often, yet I consider it as distinct from what has gone before; for he begins here a new attack on those superstitions to which the Jews were then extremely addicted. He exhorts them first to *hear the word of Jehovah;* for they had so hardened themselves in the errors which they had derived from the Gentiles, and the contagion had so prevailed, that they could not be easily drawn away from them. This, then, is the reason why he used a sort of preface, and said, *Hear ye the word of Jehovah, which he speaks to you, O house of Israel.* fB24

He then mentions the error in which the Chaldeans and the Egyptians were involved; for they were, we know, very attentive observers of the stars. And this is expressly stated, because the Jews despised God's judgments, and greatly feared what were foolishly divined. For when any one, by looking at the stars, threatened them with some calamity, they were immediately terrified; but when God denounced on them, as with the sound of a trumpet, a calamity by his Prophets, they were not at all moved. But it

will be better to examine the very words of the Prophet, as then we shall more plainly see the drift of the whole.

Learn not, he says, the way of the nations. The Hebrew grammarians take la, al ta at. fB25 Way, we know, is everywhere taken for all those customs and habits by which human life is regulated, He then forbids them to pay attention to the rules of life observed by the Gentiles. And one thing he specifies, Be not terrified by celestial signs. He afterwards shows how vain were the practices of the Gentiles; being devoted to idols, they worshipped them in the place of God, though framed by the skill of man. But there are other words added, For the heathens are terrified by them. There is a threefold exposition of this clause. Some take vk, ki, properly a causative, in the sense of k, caph, which denotes likeness, "as the Gentiles are terrified by them." Others regard it as an adversative, "though," and yk, ki, has often this meaning. There are also others who give this explanation, "For it is the case with the Gentiles, that they are terrified by them;" as though God had said, that it was extremely absurd in the Jews to be terrified by celestial signs, for they ought to have left this folly, or rather madness, to the Gentiles, as God regarded them as wholly blind. Let us now come to the subject.

Learn not, he says, the way of the Gentiles. This is a general precept. The law was to the Jews a rule which was sure, and prescribed to them the limits of duty; they ought, therefore, to have followed what God taught them in his law, and not to have turned aside either to the right hand or to the left, according to what Moses also had said. But as human minds are always wanton, they were very desirous of knowing what the Gentiles observed; but whenever this wantonness possesses men's minds, they necessarily blend darkness with light. It was then, for this reason, that

Jeremiah reminded them, that nothing was to be learnt from the Gentiles; as though he had said, "Ye ought to be satisfied with the simple doctrine of the law; for unless ye are content with having God as your teacher, ye will necessarily go astray: unless, then, ye seek wilfully to err, keep the way which is pointed out to you in the law, and turn not aside to the rites and practices of the Gentiles."

After having given them a general command not to turn aside from the plain doctrine of the law, he specifies one thing in particular, Be not terrified by celestial signs, that is, "Do not suppose that prosperity or adversity depends on the position or aspect of the stars." There seems, however, to be here some inconsistency, for he mentions the stars as signs; it hence follows that something is intimated by their position; and Moses also says, that the sun and moon, and all the stars, (and especially the planets,) would be for signs. There are, at the same time, in the firmament, twelve signs by which astrologers especially make their calculations. Since then God has, from the beginning of the creation, appointed what they call the fixed stars in the firmament, as well as the planets, to be for signs, the Prophet seems not to have done right in forbidding the Jews to fear such signs; for these signs in the heavens are not the vain fictions of men, but what God has created and appointed; and we have already stated that the stars are not called signs through the foolish conceit of men, but this character was given them by God himself when they were first created; and if the stars presage to us either prosperity or adversity, it follows that they ought to be dreaded by us.

But the Prophet here does not use the word signs in its proper meaning; for he refers not to its true origin, but accommodates himself to the notions which then prevailed; $^{\mathrm{fB26}}$ and we must bear in mind what I have already said,

that the Egyptians and Chaldeans were much given to that astrology, which is called at this day judiciary. The word itself may be allowed; but it has been long ago profaned by wicked and unprincipled men, whose object has been to make gain by mere falsehoods. There is no doubt but that the Egyptians and the Chaldeans were true astrologers, and understood the art, which in itself is praiseworthy; for to observe the stars, what else is it, but to contemplate that wonderful workmanship, in which the power, as well as the wisdom and goodness of God, shines forth? And, indeed, astrology may justly be called the alphabet of theology; for no one can with a right mind come to the contemplation of the celestial framework, without being enraptured with admiration at the display of God's wisdom, as well as of his power and goodness. I have no doubt, then, but that the Chaldeans and the Egyptians had learned that art, which in itself is not only to be approved, but is also most useful, and contains not only the most delightful speculations, but ought also to contribute much towards exciting in the hearts of men a high reverence for God. Hence Moses was instructed from his childhood in that art, and also Daniel among the Chaldeans. (Acts 7:22; Daniel 1:17, 20.) Moses learned astrology as understood by the Egyptians, and Daniel as known by the Chaldeans; but the art among them was at that time much adulterated; for they had mingled, as I have already said, foolish divinations with the true and genuine science.

As then the Prophet's meaning seems evident, the truth remains fixed, that the sun, and moon, and other planets, and the fixed stars in the firmament, are for signs. But we must notice also here the purpose for which God intended the sun and moon to be signs. His purpose was, that the lunar course should complete one month, and that the solar course should complete one year. And then the twelve signs were designed to answer another purpose: for when the

sun is in Cancer it has not the same power and influence as when it is in Virgo; and it differs as to the other signs. In short, as to the order of nature, the stars, the planets, as well as the fixed stars, are to us for signs. We number the years by the solar course, and the months by the lunar; and then the sun, with respect to the twelve signs, introduces the spring, then the summer, then the autumn, and lastly the winter. There are other purposes; but we include in one sentence whatever can be said of the celestial signs, when we say, that they have a reference to the order of nature. Whosoever, then, seeks to make more of these signs, confounds the order established by God, as the Chaldeans formerly did, and also the Egyptians, when they sought to ascend higher than reason warranted: they tried to conjecture by the position of the stars what would be the fates of all nations; and then they dared to come down to the cases of individuals. Hence arose the casters of nativities. Then they first began more anxiously to philosophize, that the sun, when in a certain sign, portends the death of an only son, and happy events to another. But these are things, as we have said, which are beyond the usual order of nature. That there is to be, for instance, summer and winter, this is natural and common; but that there is to be war between one nation and another, this is not by the usual order of things, nor takes place according to what nature appoints, but through the ambition and avarice of men. The hidden providence of God, indeed, rules; but we speak of causes, which ought to be understood by us, and which can be comprehended by us, for they are within the reach of our understanding. It must at the same time be observed, that the course of the stars is in itself of no moment: for we see that God varies the seasons: there is not the same state of weather; we have no winters and no summers exactly alike; there is no year which is not dissimilar to the former; and the third which follows, differs from the second.

We hence, then, learn that God has so formed and ordered the sun, and the moon, and all the stars, that he himself still governs and changes the seasons as it pleases him. In this way we account for sterilities, and pestilences, and other things of this kind. When the air seems temperate, pestilence prevails, the year is less fruitful, and men are famished, and no cause appears. Then this diversity in nature itself shews that God has not resigned his power to the stars, but that he so works by them, that he still holds the reins of government, and that he, according to his own will, rules the world in a way different from what even the acutest can divine by the stars. Yet this is no reason why we should deny to them the office which I have mentioned. But they who exceed the limits fixed by God, and seek to form conjectures respecting war in this country and peace in that countrymthey who thus seek to learn from the stars what is beyond the order of nature, blend heaven and earth together. The Prophet, no doubt, intended to condemn this madness when he forbade the Jews to attend to the celestial signs so as to dread them.

But the reason also must be noticed, why the Prophet so severely condemned that fear which prevailed among the Gentiles: it was for this, because when the opinion prevailed that all events depended on the stars, the fearof God was removed, and nothing was ascribed to his judgments, faith was extinguished, and prayer to God, and all the ordinances of religion, were reduced to nothing. For all the astrologers, who falsely assume so honorable a name, yea those unprincipled men, who add to their impostures the name of judiciary astrology, hold and maintain, that a judgment respecting man's life ought to be formed by the horoscope, as though the fortune of every one depended on the stars. When, therefore, any one is born at a certain hour, this or that condition, according to

them, awaits him. Thus they imagine that there is a fate, or some necessity, which holds a man bound to the influence of the sun, moon, and stars: for he was born when the sun was in the tail of that sign or in the head of another; his birth portends such and such fortune; he will live but a short time, or he will live long. Thus they judge. And they go still farther, and pronounce on every occurrence, "Such will be the issue of this expedition; this during the year will be unhappily undertaken, but that will succeed." Afterwards, when nativity is not taken into an account, they subject the whole human race to the uncontrollable influence of the stars: "See, if you undertake this business on such a day, you will succeed; but if you begin before mid-day, the issue will be unsuccessful." Thus they divine concerning the whole life of man with regard to each of his actions: but God never intended the stars to be signs for such purposes.

Now, as I have said, it hence follows that God does not rule, and that thus faith is extinguished, and all the exercises of religion are reduced to nothing. For whosoever is persuaded that he is bound by necessity, because the horoscope is of such a character, he must necessarily die at such an hour, and necessarily die of a certain kind of death, — will any one who has this conviction call on God? will he commend his life to his keeping? And then, when any adversity happens, who will bear it as a punishment for his sins? Will he acknowledge that he is called to judgment by God? And if he should prosper, will he be led to sing praises to God?

We hence see that this divination extinguishes all religion; for there will be no faith, there will be no recognition of punishment, no acknowledgment of God's blessings, and no concern for sin, whenever this diabolical error possesses our minds, — that we are subject to the stars, that such and

such is our nativity, and that the stars portend some kind of death every day and every moment. This, then, is what is especially intended by the Prophet in forbidding the Jews to be terrified by the celestial signs; for the Chaldeans, no doubt, prophesied that they should have a new empire; and thus they frightened the miserable Jews: "It is all over with us, for the astrologers among the Chaldeans have so spoken; and on the other hand the Egyptians see also that this has been foreshewn by the position of the stars." Thus it happened that the Jews became, as it were, wholly lifeless. Nor did they remember what God had so often, and for so many years, threatened by his Prophets to do, in case they continued to provoke his wrath. Of God's judgment they made no account; and yet the persuasion, that the Chaldeans announced a judgment by the stars, and that there would be some convulsion, filled them with terror and amazement. Hence the Prophet, in order to lead them to repentance, as well as to faith, which are the two essentials of religion, and include in them the perfection of true wisdom, speaks thus to them in effect, "Fear not the stars, but fear God." For there is implied a contrast between God and the stars; as though he had said, "When any adversity happens to you, know that you are chastised by God's hand, who is a just avenger of sins." This was to teach them repentance; it was to shew them that they justly suffered, because they had been perverse in their wickedness. Then follows the other fact, that though the stars threatened calamity and destruction, they were to flee to God's mercy and never doubt of their safety, provided he was propitious to them. We now then understand the Prophet's object in telling them not to fear the stars.

More things might be said, but! study brevity as far as I can; and I trust that I have briefly included what is sufficient for the understanding of this passage. There are many, I know, at this day foolishly curious, and hence wish

some account to be made of judiciary astrology; and this delirium has taken possession of some pious men and really learned: but we see what God here declares by his servant. And I wonder that some are thus credulous as to the stars, who yet speak with extreme subtlety on free-will. They would have the events of things fortuitous, they would have it that men act freely in both ways, and they hate and abhor fate; and yet they confine God as it were in a prison, and would have the stars to rule. This is to me a prodigy, not a sign. But all these things I leave. Let the plain doctrine of the Prophet be deemed sufficient by us, when he says, that we are not to be terrified by signs, for it belongs to the Gentiles to be thus terrified; for I am disposed to take this meaning, — that the Prophet says that this was a kind of blindness which belonged to them: "Leave," he says, "this folly to the Gentiles; it is no wonder that they labor under so many errors and delusions, for celestial truth has never shone upon them; but it becomes you to fear God and to rely on his mercy." It follows —

Jeremiah 10:3

3. For the customs of the people *are* vain: for *one* cutteth a tree out of the forest (the work of the hands of the workman) with the axe.

3. Quoniam statuta populorum vanitas est: nam lignum a sylva scindit, opus manuum artificis dolabra (vel, in securi; nam ponitur b, quoe est nota instrumenti apud Hebroeos.)

The Prophet seems to break off his subject, and even to reason inconclusively; for he had said in the last verse, "Learn not the rites of the Gentiles, and fear not the celestial signs;" and he now adds, *Because the rites of the Gentiles are vanity; for wood they cut down from the forest.* He seems then, as though forgetting himself, to have passed off to idols. But we must observe, that the Jews

were influenced by that ancient opinion, that the Chaldeans and the Egyptians were alone wise, and that they had acquired a fame of this kind among all nations. We find also that heathen writers, when speaking of the origin of the sciences, trace them up to the Chaldeans and the Egyptians; for with them, it is said, have originated astrology and all the liberal sciences. The Jews then, no doubt, allowed so much authority to the Chaldeans and the Egyptians, that their minds, being possessed by that prejudice, could discern nothing aright. The Prophet then shakes off from them this stupidity, and shews how foolish they were, who yet would have themselves to be alone deemed wise, and regarded others, compared with themselves, as barbarous and ignorant. We now then see why the Prophet connects idolatry with that false and spurious astrology which he had mentioned.

He says, *Laws:* the word, twqj, *chekut*, means strictly, statutes. The word, qj *chek*, signifies to decree, or to write; and hence decrees are called twqj, *chekut*. The word Law is general; and one of those which are special and often occurs in Scripture, is the statute. Some render it "Edict;" and the verb means to publish by edict. But this word is often applied to ceremonies and rites. He then says, that *the rites of the nations were vanity.*

He then proves this, *Because they cut for themselves trees from the forest;* and after having polished them by art, they think them to be gods. How detestable was this madness, to think that a tree, cut from the forest, was a god, as soon as it assumed a certain form or shape! As then a madness, so great and so monstrous, prevailed among the Chaldeans and the Egyptians, what right knowledge or judgment could have been in them? The Jews then were very foolish in thinking that they were very clear — sighted. "They are," he says, "brute animals; for it is wholly contrary to reason

to suppose that a god can be made from a dead piece of wood. When, therefore, the Chaldeans and the Egyptians amaze and astonish you through the influence of a false opinion, derived from nothing, that they are alone wise, do ye not see that ye are doubly and trebly mad? for where is their wisdom, when they thus make gods from trunks of trees?"

We now then perceive the design of the Prophet: but as these circumstances have not been considered by interpreters, they have only elicited a frigid doctrine and gathered some general thoughts. But when any one rightly and carefully examines the design of the Prophet, he will find how important is what he teaches; and no one can otherwise rightly understand what Jeremiah means.

A tree then does one cut, etc.: he uses the singular number. fB27 He then adds, the work of the hands of the artificer by the ax. He shews that nature itself is changed through the false imagination of men; for as soon as it takes a new form, it seems to be no longer a tree. The tree, while it grows, when it produces fruit, is not worshipped as God; but when it is cut down, the dead and dry trunk is substituted in the place of God: for what reason? even because the ax has been applied. Some render it "hatchet," hache, ou doloire, which is the same; for there is no ambiguity in the meaning: they cut down trees from the forests; and then after the tree was formed by the ax and worked by the hands of the artificer, what follows was done to it —

Ieremiah 10:4-5

4. They deck it with silver and with gold; the fasten it with nails and with the hammers, that it move not.4. Argento et auro pulchrificant (hoc est,

exornant) illud; clavis et malleis fortificant (hoc est, bene defigunt;) et non movebitur (hoc est, ut non moveatur.)

5. They *are* upright as the palm-tree, but speak not: they must needs be borne, because they cannot go. Be not afraid of them; for they cannot do evil, neither also *is it* in them to do good. **5**. Sicuti palma aequalis (hoc est, stat effigies illa aequalis tanquam palma, id est, assurgit in rectitudinem;) et non loquuntur; et tollendo tolluntur, quia non ambulabunt (hoc est, non possunt ambulare:) ne timeatis ab illis; quia non male faciunt, atque etiam bene facere non penes ipsos.

He goes on with the same subject, and borrows his words from the forty — fourth chapter of Isaiah (Isaiah 44); for the passage is wholly similar. Jeremiah, being later, was induced to take the words from his predecessor, that his own nation might be more impressed, on finding that the same thing was said by two Prophets, and that thus they had two witnesses.

He then says that these wise men, who filled the Jews with wonder and astonishment, adorned their images, or statues, with silver and gold, and afterward fixed them with nails and with hammers, that they might not move. Some refer the last word to the metal, "that the pieces might not come off," as the verb sometimes means to depart. But the simpler meaning is, that the statues were fixed by nails and hammers, that they might not be moved. Then the Prophet adds by way of concession, They are indeed erect as the palm-trees; and thus there appears in them something remarkable: but they speak not; and then, being raised they are raised, that is, they cannot move themselves; for they cannot walk. Then he says, Be not afraid of them; for they do no evil, nor is it in their power to do good.

We now see what the Prophet meant to teach us, — that the wisdom of the Chaldeans, and also of the Egyptians, was

celebrated throughout the world, and also so blinded the Jews, or so enraptured, them, that they thought that nothing proceeded from them but what deserved to be known and esteemed. In order therefore to remove and demolish this false notion, he shews that they were beyond measure foolish; for what could have been more sottish than to think that the nature of a tree is changed as soon as it receives a new form? How? By the hand of the artificer. Can it be in the power of man to make a god at his will? This is a folly which heathen authors have derided. Horace has this sentence: —

"When the workman was uncertain whether to make a bench or Priapus, He chose rather to make a god." $^{\rm fB27A}$

That poet, as he dared not generally to condemn the madness which then prevailed, indirectly shewed how shameful it was to make a log of wood a god, because the workman had given it a form. The very richest worshipped a wooden god, while he despised the artificer! He who would not have condescended to give the workman a cup of water, yet prostrated himself befbre the god which the workman had made! This then is what our Prophet now says, "Behold, with silver and gold do they adorn trunks of trees; they indeed stood up, for they are erect statues;" and he compares them to palm-trees, because they stood high: and he says, "but they speak not; they are raised up, for they have no life; hence fear them not:" and then he adds, "They cannot do evil, and it is not in their power to do good."

The Prophet seems to speak improperly when he says that they were not gods, because they could do no evil; for it is wholly contrary to the nature of the only true God to do evil: but the Prophet, according to what is common, uses the word for the infliction of punishment. God, then, is said to do evil, not because he does harm to any one, not because he does wrong to any mortals, but because he chastises them for their sins. And it is a way of speaking derived from the common judgment of man, for we call those things evils which are afflictions to us; for famine, diseases, poverty, cold, heat, disgrace, and things of this kind, are called afflictions or adversities. Now, the Prophet says, that the idols of the Gentiles, or their fictitious gods, do no evil, that is, they have no power to inflict punishment on men. And this is taken from Isaiah. God uses there a twofold argument, while claiming divinity to himself alone: he says,

"I alone am he who foresees and predicts future things;"

and hence I am God alone; and then he says,

"I alone am he who do good and evil;"

hence I alone am God. (Isaiah 45:22; Isaiah 48:3, 5.) He says, that he doeth evil, because he is the Judge of the world. We hence see that this expression is not to be taken in a bad sense, but, as I have said, it is to be taken in a sense used by men; for we consider and call those punishments, with which God visits us, evils. It follows —

Jeremiah 10:6

6. Forasmuch as *there is* none like unto thee, O Lord; thou art great, and thy name is great in might.
6. A non fB28 (vel, ab eo quod non, hoc est, ab ultimis temporibus non) sicut tu Jehova reperietur; magnus tu, et magnum nomen tuum in fortitudine.

As the truth respecting the gods of the heathens, that they are mere figments, would be useless and of no moment, were not the knowledge of the, true God added, the Prophet now introduces God himself. And there is another reason; for no one could know that these wooden and stony gods are of no account, were not the truth respecting the true God to shine forth. Whosoever does not understand that there is a God, and does not know who or what he is, can never be really influenced by this truth, that the gods of the heathens are demons, and that all their superstitions are sacrilegious.

We now then perceive why the Prophet turns to the true God: it was, that the brightness of God's glory might dissipate the darkness in which the Gentiles were involved, and also, that true religion might really influence the hearts of men, so that by acknowledging the one true God, to whose power we ought to submit, they might not only despise and repudiate all idols, but also hate and abhor them. The rest to-morrow.

PRAYER

Grant, Almighty God, that since thou hast made heaven and earth for our sake, and hast testified by thy servant Moses, that the sun, as well as the moon, to which foolish heathens ascribe divinity, are to be serviceable to us, and that we are to use them as though they were our servants, — O grant that we may, by thy so many blessings, have our minds raised upwards and contemplate thy true glory, so that we may faithfully worship thee only, and surre~der ourselves so entirely to thee, that while we enjoy the benefits derived from all the stars, and also from the earth, we may know that we are bound to thee by so many favors, in order that we may be more and more