

**HINTS ON THE  
INTERPRETATION OF  
PROPHECY, PP. 1-193**

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# HINTS

ON THE

## INTERPRETATION OF PROPHECY.

BY

M. STUART,

PROFESSOR IN ANDOVER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY.

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Second Edition,

WITH ADDITIONS AND CORRECTIONS.

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## P R E F A C E .

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No apology is necessary for engaging in the investigation of the subjects, which are briefly treated of in the following sheets. These matters are of deep interest to every inquiring Christian; and the character of the Scriptures, in the view of the world, is in no small degree concerned with them. Unbelievers reproach us with giving credit to a book which is full of enigmas, and allege that every one interprets it according to his own fancy, and so as to support his own particular opinions. Nor is this all. They even charge ambiguity upon the Scriptures themselves; and they are apparently moved to do this, by the ever varying, discrepant, and sometimes even opposite conclusions of expositors. No book, they say, which is plainly and honestly written, could possibly afford room for such diversity of opinion.

Particularly have such charges been made against the *prophecies*. These have been compared to the ambiguous vaticinations of the heathen oracles, and pronounced to be deserving of merely the same credit which is given to them by enlightened minds.

One might reply to all this by saying, that the *abuse* of a thing is no good argument against the right and proper use of it; that the mistakes of expositors are not chargeable upon the original writers, unless those mistakes are unavoidably connected with the expressions of those writers; and finally, that when men, ill-informed or ignorant of the true nature of scriptural language, misinterpret or pervert it, it can

be no good ground of objection to the sacred books as they are in themselves.

If, in addition to such a reply, it can be shown that the *prophecies*, against which the charges in question are specially directed, are susceptible of a plain, fair, and natural interpretation, and that historical *facts* accord with such an interpretation, the stumbling block that is cast in our way would seem to be removed.

An attempt to do this, in regard to some of the more important prophetic passages, which have of late years been the subject of frequent and animated discussion, is made in the following pages. To write a large volume on such topics would be comparatively easy; to select, combine, and exhibit matter appropriate to a small one, is a more difficult task.

If the path in which I travel should be thought by some to be *new*, I hope this will not prevent any reader from giving it a leisurely and thorough examination, before he abandons it. If some of the *results*, in this little treatise, should appear *new* to the reader, I must suggest to him, that they are not the consequence of seeking after novelties, but simply of following out the plain and obvious principles of interpretation. If he does not find it to be so after examination, let him condemn the book.

If there be any *Bible for us*, it is one which consists of human language, interpreted in a manner consonant with the laws of language. My principal object is, to protest against the substitution of fancy and conjecture in the interpretation of the Scriptures, in the place of established principle and rule. With a sincere love for all that is *new*, whenever it is better than the old, I am still, throughout this book, a thorough *Conservative* in respect to the fixed and immutable principles of reasonable hermeneutics. I hope for a hearing—I will not despair even of approbation—by those who love this species of *Conservatism*. At all events, if it must be that



any will be disposed to turn away from the subject with only a slight examination of it, and thus decline to give me a fair opportunity to gain their assent, I would at least say : *Πάραξεν μὲν, ἀκούσον δὲ!*

It is time for the churches, in reference to the matters now before us, to seek some refuge from the tumultuous ocean on which they have of late been tossed. To those who long for a quiet harbor, a chart, which offers even any tolerable grounds of hope that the course toward such a haven is marked out, will not be unwelcome.

I make no promises. I have satisfied myself as to the course which ought to be pursued ; and in this state of mind it is natural to cherish a hope, that a process of thinking and reasoning, similar to that through which I have passed, may satisfy others. With this hope I give my little book to the public.

Some of the views, which are exhibited in the following pages, may be found in the early volumes of the *Biblical Repository*, ranged under different titles. But they are here repeated with many modifications and additions. My present apprehension is, that continued and often repeated study and reflection have corrected those views, in some respects; if not, they have at least served to expand them. There is, moreover, some important advantage in having them brought together, and exhibited so that a comparison of them may be easily made.

The introduction of a few Hebrew and Greek words was unavoidable, in the execution of my plan. For the most part these are so managed, as to occasion no serious embarrassment to the well-informed English reader.

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Thus far the preface to the first edition of this work. A second being now demanded, I take occasion to say, that I

have carefully revised the whole ; made a number of corrections which sometimes qualify, and at other times set aside, the diction originally employed ; and in a variety of cases, I have made additions, some of which at least will not, as I trust, be deemed unimportant. The criticisms of friends, and the objections of opponents, have as yet reached me only in a very few cases. Most of the additions, therefore, are only such as were prompted by my own mind, after revising the whole work.

It would be easy to swell the volume to a considerable size, and still leave many things unsaid, which might be appropriately said. But a large book would defeat some of the purposes that I have in view, and anticipate other things which I hope ere long to publish in a different way.

M. STUART.

*Theol. Seminary, Andover,* }  
*Sept. 10, 1844.* }

## HINTS

RESPECTING THE

### INTERPRETATION OF PROPHECY.

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#### § 1. INTRODUCTION.

THE history of scriptural interpretation presents few, if any, phenomena more peculiar than those which have been exhibited, by some of the modes in which parts of the books of Daniel and of the Revelation have been explained, by a large class of English and American expositors. It would be a difficult task to enumerate all the writers of the class in question, who have made their appearance before the public; and still more difficult, to make out even a sketch of all their peculiar and in some respects ever varying interpretations. It is no part of my present design to attempt this. As a polemic, or an antagonist of particular writers, it is not my wish or intention to appear. Nor is it at all within my purpose to write a book on the general subject of expounding prophecy. My design is, to keep strictly within the bounds designated by the title of this Essay; and therefore I shall attempt no more than to give some HINTS, addressed to the consideration of the Christian public, in respect to some two or three of the principles gene-