From the Editor's Notebook: The Minor Prophets

W. Ross Rainey

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Hosea

From the Editor’s Notebook

W. Ross Rainey

Outline Studies of the Minor Prophets

Hosea: The Book of Love’s Victory

Key Word: Return (15 times).

Message: “An exhibition of God’s method in the restoration of backsliders” (Robert Lee).1 Or, as Eric W. Hayden has summed up Hosea’s theme: “The Sin of Spiritual Adultery.”2 Key Verse: 6:11 — “Come and let us return unto the Lord; for He hath torn, and He will heal us; He hath smitten, and He will bind us up.”

Introduction

Hosea is both the first and the longest of the so-called “Minor Prophets,” each of the twelve dealing with much the same issues and each being highly patriotic and nationalistic. The names Hosea, Hoshea, Joshua and Jesus are the same in derivation and mean “salvation” (cf. Matt. 1:21). Hosea’s contemporaries were Joel, Jonah, Amos, Isaiah and Micah, and he ministered and prophesied during the prosperous and corrupt reign of Jeroboam II, having been called “the Jeremiah of the northern kingdom,” for like Jeremiah he suffered and wept over Israel’s sins. During his ministry to the northern kingdom, Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah reigned over Judah, the southern kingdom. The period of Hosea’s prophecy extended from 785-725 B.C., a longer time, probably, than any other prophet. It

is estimated that he died in his nineties. He had a very sad domestic life and trial — an unfaithful wife named Gomer — yet God used this trying experience to prepare Hosea for his office, as well as speak to Israel about her spiritual adultery in forsaking Jehovah and turning to the worship of false gods. Thus Hosea was the first, though not the last, prophet whose personal history was made a symbol to his countrymen (e.g., Jonah).

As to his style, Hosea is stoccado-like, using short, sharp sentences, and as one writer has said, “He flashes forth brilliant sentences, but writes no great chapters.” Hosea lacks the imagination, fire and vividness of Amos, yet in some respects he is considered deeper, even though difficult to follow. In fact, some Bible students consider his book the most difficult to study of all the books in the Bible. Nevertheless, the poetry and striking metaphors of his prophecy tend to make up for whatever variety of problems are encountered.

While Amos authoritatively thundered out the righteousness of God, Hosea brokenheartedly wept out of the mercy of God. The central and paramount theme of Hosea’s prophecy is the passionate and faithful love of Jehovah for His backslidden people. J. Lawrence Eason has pointed out that “the prophet’s method of persuasion, unlike that of Amos and the wilderness school of bold denunciation, was that of wooing the fallen by means of God’s love and entreaty.”3

Outline

1. Personal Trial — The faithless wife and her faithful husband (1-3)

2. National Tragedy —The faithless nation and her faithful Lord (4-14).

Notable Notes

The pivot of the entire book of Hosea centres upon the unfaithfulness of Gomer, Hosea's wife. In fact, he was commanded by God to marry her (1), and he obeyed, but she soon proved unfaithful to him (2). In spite of her sin, the Lord further commanded Hosea to seek out his unfaithful wife, follow her, redeem her out of what was apparently literal slavery and restore her to his home (3). The children she bore were an additional source of sorrow. The first child Hosea owned as his; the second, a little girl, he called Lo-ruhamah ("not beloved"), whom he disowned; and the third child he likewise disowned, having named this second son Lo-ammi ("not my people" or "no child of mine"). Each tragic detail in the home life of Hosea served as a parable in relation to the tragedy in the homeland of the northern kingdom, for Gomer represented Israel, while her children represented the people of the nation. Furthermore, Hosea's patience and pleading with Gomer, who had broken his heart, was a parable of God's love and longing for Israel. The way in which Hosea sought out his unfaithful and estranged wife was the same way in which the Lord was prepared to welcome the return of His backslidden people who had also played the harlot. Hosea was thus taught that Israel's sins were as adultery and harlotry in God's sight.

Hosea's experience was in the home; Jeremiah's was in the nation. Hosea was commanded by God to marry, and at that a harlot, or as he candidly stated, "a wife of

whoredoms" (1:2); Jeremiah was commanded by God not to marry.

The sins of the nation at that time were many: swearing, lying, murder, stealing, drunkenness, adultery, idolatry, backsliding, pride, treachery, treason, regicide (i.e., the killing of a king), insincerity, forgetfulness, ingratitude, covetousness, craft, love of sin, oppression, robbery and anarchy. The pagan priests aided and abetted murder (6:9), and the government was unstable with one faction urging compromise with Assyria and another insisting on alliance with Egypt (7:11).

Unfortunately for the nation, Hosea's pleading went unheeded. Having sown to the wind, Israel reaped the whirlwind (8:7).

Hosea is the only prophetic book in the Old Testament that has an epilogue (14:9).

The book of Hosea serves as a warning to believers against backsliding. Any preacher desiring to warn the saints against this sin would do well to preach a series of messages from this prophecy. It has been called, "A Treatise on Repentance."

Hosea deals with the condition of Israel just before the fall of Samaria, his statement of 13:16 providing us with an insight into the barbaric savagery of the Assyrians: "Samaria shall become desolate; for she hath rebelled against her God: for they shall fall by the sword: their infants shall be dashed in pieces, and their women with child be ripped up."

W. Graham Scroggie has noted that three things must be kept prominent in the study of Hosea: the PERSONAL NARRATIVE (1-3), the NATIONAL INTERPRETATION

(4-14), and the SPIRITUAL APPLICATION (1-14). The first involves the reference to husband, wife and children. The second is dominated by the notes of transgression, visitation and restoration. The third is manifold. If Amos emphasized the “severity” of God, Hosea stressed the “goodness” of God (cf. Rom. 2:11; 11:22). There are passages in Hosea which, for pathos and love, are unrivalled (2:14, 15, 19, 20; 3; 11:3, 4, 8, 14). The book emphasizes the shame of sin, the fruit of backsliding, the love of the Lord and the conditions of restoration. Chapter 3:4 & 5 discloses a remarkable prophecy telling of the present (v. 4) and of the future (v. 5) of God’s people, Israel. Chapter 14 is the greatest in the Bible for the backslider.4 “Ephraim,” used in reference to the northern kingdom, is found no less than 35 times in the book of Hosea.

Hosea himself illustrates the “love that many waters cannot quench.”

The attribute of God uppermost in Hosea’s thoughts is that Jehovah is “LORD.”

The book of Hosea reveals the LORD JESUS CHRIST as the HEALER OF THE BACKSLIDER.

1 Robert Lee, The Outlined Bible.

2 Eric W. Hayden, Preaching through the Bible, p. 126.

3 J. Lawrence Eason, The New Bible Survey, p. 282.

4 W. Graham Scroggie, Know Your Bible, I, p. 168.

Joel

From the Editor’s Notebook

W. Ross Rainey

Outline Studies of the Minor Prophets

Joel: The Book of the Day of the Lord

Key Word: Visitation.

Message: “The Value and Importance of Repentance” (Robert Lee).1 Key Verses: 1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14.

“Alas for the day! for the day of the Lord is at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come” (1:15).

Introduction

Nothing is known of the prophet Joel beyond the brief introduction he gives himself in 1:1. He is one of 14 men in the Bible who bear the name Joel, the first having been Samuel’s eldest son (1 Sam. 8:2). The name is compounded of two divine names, Yahveh (Jehovah) and El, and it means “Jehovah is God.”

Modern critics assign the prophet Joel a post-exilic date, while conservative scholars place him as perhaps the earliest of the so-called minor prophets, during the reign of Joash (c. 800 B.C.). The point of controversy is that he does not mention the Assyrians and Babylonians. In any case, his message was to Judah, not to the ten-tribe kingdom of Israel, and if the earlier date is accepted then Joel was contemporary with Jonah, Amos and Hosea.

Joel has been called “The Prophet of Religious Revival.” In his introduction to Joel’s prophecy, C. I. Scofield states that “In his youth he may have known Elijah, and he certainly was a contemporary of Elisha.”2 W. Graham Scroggie says of Joel’s style of writing that it is “elegant, clear, and impassioned, and must be given a high place in Hebrew literature.” He further notes that “the Book falls into two main parts. In the first Joel speaks, and in the second Jehovah. The first part is historical, and the second, prophetical. The first tells of desolation, and the second of deliverance.”3 An unknown author has said of this brief literary gem that its “style is pre-eminently pure, and is characterized by smoothness and fluency, strength and tenderness.” The key to the understanding and interpretation of Joel’s prophecy is the repeated phrase, “the day of the Lord” (1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14), which will begin once the Church has been raptured. It will be characterized by God’s wrath and judgment unleashed upon a Christ-rejecting, sin-ridden world, and by His direct intervention once again into the course and affairs of world politics. Time-wise “the day of the Lord” will extend for a thousand years.

A plague of locusts and a severe drought brought Joel the illustrations he needed to appeal to the conscience of his nation. Although Moses (Deut. 28:38-39) and Solomon (1 Kings 8:37) had mentioned locusts as an instrument of divine chastening, the people in this instance did not recognize them as such. Joel’s mission was to point out to the people the sad condition of their spiritual life, and to press home to their hearts the need for national repentance as the essential step in returning to the Lord.

Outline

1. The Plague (1)

2. The Prophecy (2-3)

Or, if a little more detailed outline is preferred, John Phillips with his amazingly able alliterative ability has summarized Joel's main points as follows:

1. The Present Famine (1:1-20)

2. The Predicted Foes (2:1-11)

3. The Promised Forgiveness (2:12-27)

4. The Prophetic Focus (2:28-3:21)4

Notable Notes

Three things are especially prominent in Joel:

1. It contains the greatest description in all literature of locust devastation.

2. It gives the first intimation in the Bible of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon all flesh (2:28-29).

3. Its prophecies are remarkable for their scope, extending from Joel's day to the end of time.

Joel's reference to locusts would have included a variety of large grasshoppers, such being the scourge of many lands throughout the world. Those who have seen these pesky creatures swarm relate that their countless legions blot out the sun, cover the ground and fill the sky in whatever direction one looks. On the ground they march in regular lines like armies of soldiers with their leaders in front. They have been described as "the incarnation of hunger," the devastation they leave in their wake being utter and complete. It has been pointed

out that the interpretation of the locusts in Joel may be actual, allegorical, or apocalyptical. However, there is no reason to doubt that Judah had been invaded by a literal swarm of locusts, whereupon Joel was directed by the Spirit of God to use this calamity as a means of communicating God's message to the people that an invasion would come which would be far worse than a serious plague of large grasshoppers.

Thus the literal plague of locusts was but a picture of another more terrible invasion of Judah's enemies coming in like a flood. However, there are details in Joel's prophecy which have never yet been fulfilled, these pointing to the world forces which shall appear in the last days.

No doubt the best known prophecy of Joel concerns the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in 2:28-32. The Apostle Peter made use of this prophecy on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:16-21. While it is clear that Pentecost was in Joel's prophecy, it is not clear that Penetecost exhausted that prophecy, for Joel 2:30-32 seems to point to a time yet future, a time which falls in the period of the apocalypse of Matthew 24: 29-31.

As already indicated in the introduction, the theme of "the day of the Lord" runs through Joel's prophecy. It is one of the most important themes in Bible prophecy, many of the other Old Testament prophets not only mention it but lend description to it as well. It is a period which closes this present age of man's misrule of planet earth, ushering in the Lord Jesus Christ as the "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS" (Rev. 19:16). It is a day that begins in terrible judgment, then issues in full and lasting blessing, and finally climaxes in further

judgment and blessing at the end of its thousand-year duration.

Those who have not yet received God's "so great salvation" through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ should earnestly heed Joel's solemn words, where he says of such: "Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision; for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision" (3:14).

In Joel's brief but highly significant prophecy the LORD JESUS CHRIST is revealed as the RESTORER.

The Annual Meeting

On Saturday, October 26, 1985, the annual committee meeting of FOOD FOR THE FLOCK INC. was convened at Don Valley Bible Chapel in Toronto. Looking back upon our gathering, I cannot help but be reminded of Psalm 133:1—"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity." As our Lord enables us, it is with renewed commitment that we plan to continue publishing "Food for the Flock" magazine through 1986. It brings joy and gratitude to our hearts to know that He is using it for the blessing and edification of His people. Written and vocal expressions of appreciation for its ministry from our readers both at home and abroad continue to be a source of great encouragement.

Comparatively speaking, the magazine represents a small work with a limited outreach. But, as Warren W. Wiersbe has reminded us, "No work is small if it is God's work. No gift is small if it is given in faith and love. No act of service is small if it is done to the glory of

Christ” (The Bumps Are What You Climb On, pp. 99-100).

On behalf of our entire committee, I wish to express our many thanks to you, our readers, for your continued encouragement, practical support and prayers.

“Brethren, pray for us” (1 Thess. 5:25).

—The Editor

A Special Request

Mr. John H. Rush, the Librarian of Emmaus Bible College, has asked for back issues of “Food for the Flock” magazine which are missing from their library. I was able to send him several copies of issues he requested, but the following issues are still desired:

Vol. 1, No. 1-12, 1955

Vol. 4, No. 5, 7, 8, 12. 1958

Vol. 5, No. 1, 3, 4, 6-9, 1959

Vol. 6, No. 2, 4, 5, 8, 1960

Vol. 7, No. 1-12, 1961

Vol. 12, No. 4, 10, 1966

Vol. 14, No. 6, 1968

Vol. 1, No. 5, 1969

Vol. 2, No. 1, 5, 1970

Vol. 3, No. 6, 1971

If any of our readers could supply one or more of the above issues, please send the same to: Mr. John H. Rush, Librarian, Emmaus Bible College, 2570 Asbury Road, Dubuque, Iowa 52001-3096.

—The Editor

A Special Note

Commencing with this issue, Dr. S. Lewis Johnson, Jr. of Believers Chapel, Dallas, Texas, presents the first of a series of thought-provoking, practical studies of ROMANS 11.

1 Robert Lee, The Outlined Bible.

2 C. 1. Scofield, Editor, The Scofield Reference Bible, p. 930.

3 W. Graham Scroggie, Know Your Bible, I, p. 155.

4 John Phillips, Exploring the Scriptures, pp. 123-24.

Amos

From the Editor’s Notebook

W. Ross Rainey

Outline Studies of the Minor Prophets

Amos: The Book of National Accountability

Key Word: Punishment.

Message: “National Sin means National Judgment” (Robert Lee).1 Or, as Eric W. Hayden has stated, “The Patience of God in Punishment.”2 Key Verses: 3:1-2; 4:12.

“Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God” (4:12).

Introduction

In the Hebrew language the name Amos means “to carry a burden.” Amos was a rustic, a herdman from the region of Tekoa, an area of barren hill country some six miles SE of Bethlehem, overlooking the Dead Sea. Like Elisha, he was called to the prophetic office while pursuing his daily round of activities and duties. He made no claim to be either a prophet or a prophet’s son (see 7:14-15). He was not of the schools of men, having had no professional training, but was a herdman and dresser of fruit trees. Though of Judea and called by God to be a prophet to the whole house of Jacob (3:1, 13), his ministry was chiefly to the northern kingdom (7:14-15) at the main sanctuary at Bethel (7:10). His ministry took place in the latter part of the reign of Jeroboam II in

Israel (c. 782-753 B.C.) and during the reign of Uzziah (Azariah) of Judah (c. 791-740 B.C.), thus placing Amos' preaching about 765-750 B.C. His call was at a time when both kingdoms were experiencing economic boom accompanied by luxurious living, moral corruption and abounding idolatry. It was against these sins that Amos directed his fiery oratory, the book affording ample application to modern times. He was contemporary with Hosea and Jonah, and possibly with Joel if a later date is accepted for Joel's ministry.

What we know about Amos' life is found in 1:1 and 7:14 & 15, yet from the content of his prophecy much can be learned concerning the manner of his life. He was an outdoorsman, a herdman, a dresser of fruit trees. This last description means that he was a "nipper" or "pincher" of the wild fig which is ripened by puncturing and eaten only by the poorest. Throughout his book he retains a wholesome naturalness, sharpness of mind and a deep appreciation of nature. In his illustrations he speaks of the bird in the nest, two men meeting in the desert, a shepherd snatching from the mouth of a lion two legs and the piece of an ear, sycamore trees, grasshoppers, a basket of summer fruit, a wagon loaded with shelves, cattle-driving, corn-winnowing, and other picturesque references. Although Amos had no formal training, his freshness, vigor, vividness and simplicity of speech are unsurpassed by any of his successors, his language reminding readers of James and Jude in the New Testament.

An unknown source has attributed the following statement to a past prince of expositors, Alexander MacLaren: "If one fancies a godly Scottish Highlander sent to the West End of London, or a Bible-reading New

England farmer's man sent to New York's 'Upper Ten,' one will have some notion of this prophet, the impression made, and the task laid upon him."

Outline

1. The Eight Burdens —Declamations (1-2)

2. The Three Sermons —Proclamations (3-6)

3. The Five Visions —Revelations (7-9)

Notable Notes

Amos was the prophet of woe. He had a stern message for a luxury-loving and self-indulgent age, his particular burden being one concerning punishment. His prophecy reveals that national sin issues in national judgment and, while the sin of individuals will be judged at the Great White Throne, nations of the world are judged in the course of time. History thoroughly confirms this, although it is recognized from Scripture that there is a specific end-time judgment of the Gentile nations in preparation for the millennial reign of Christ (Matt. 25:31-46).

Amos, like Nehemiah, was a model worker for God, and by a thoughtful reading of his book we readily note his:

1. Humility.

2. Industry.

3. Wisdom.

4. Perception.

5. Faithfulness.

6. Steadfastness (see 7:10-17).

7. Authority ("Thus saith the Lord").

8. Success (7:10).

“Two years before the earthquake” (1:1), Amos began his prophetic ministry at Bethel. He foretold this earthquake which must have been of exceptional severity (see 5:8; 6:11; 8:8; 9:5, for Zechariah speaks of it almost 300 years later as an event well remembered (Zech. 14:5).

Amos charged Israel with the sins of greed, injustice, drunkenness, immorality, profanity and oppression (2:6-12). They sought to excuse themselves on the ground that they were God’s chosen people (3:2), and in turn Amos replied that their relation to God was an aggravation of their offence. Though at the peak of prosperity, the nation was nevertheless on the brink of disaster. In the midst of Israel’s compromise and corruption Amos proclaimed the sovereignty of God, the God of all creation (1:2; 4:13; 5:8).

The preaching of Amos soon aroused the anger of Amaziah the priest of Bethel (7:10-13), who in turn reported him to Jeroboam, complaining that Amos was a danger to national security. He even took it upon himself to order Amos out of the country. To Amaziah’s face, Amos declared that regardless of his humble background and lack of formal education, he could foresee the day when Amaziah’s wife would be “an harlot in the city,” a victim of the invader’s lust, and Amaziah himself dying as a captive in a heathen land.

Of Amos and his preaching, W. Graham Scroggie has commented: “The threats of doom are interspersed with exhortations to ‘seek the Lord’ (five times), and with the promise of a better day to dawn (ix. 11-15). Things to regard specially in this Book are its style, figures of

speech, autobiographical material, the political and religious situation at home and abroad, the story of Amaziah's opposition, and references to places and peoples."3 Amos depicted the destruction of Israel in five ways:

1. Locusts (7:1).

2. Fire (7:4).

3. A Plumb Line (7:7).

4. A Basket of Summer Fruit (8:1).

5. Spiritual Famine (9:1).

One of Amos' great challenges was: "Prepare to meet thy God" (4:12).

The only time the word "chapel" is mentioned in the Bible is in 7:13 (KJV).

James quotes the words of Amos 9:11 & 12 in Acts 15:15 & 16, seeing the fulfillment of these words in the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the book of Amos the LORD JESUS CHRIST is revealed as the HEAVENLY HUSBANDMAN.

A Special Note

We regret that the November-December 1985 issue of "Food for the Flock" was so late in reaching our readers. The serious illness of two key employees at Midland Printers Company Ltd. was the reason for the long delay. While a few of our printer's clients were not kindly disposed toward this inconvenience, the editor on behalf of all of us used this circumstance to communicate a spirit of Christian courtesy and understanding, the same

having been received with much appreciation by the owner of Midland Printers, Mr. Herbert J. Henderson.

1 Robert Lee, The Outlined Bible.

2 Eric W. Hayden, Preaching through the Bible, p. 134.

3 W. Graham Scroggie, Know Your Bible, I, p. 164.

Obadiah

From the Editor’s Notebook

W. Ross Rainey

Outline Studies of the Minor Prophets

Obadiah: The Book of Edom’s Doom

Key Word: Retribution.

Message: “Solemn warning against the perils of pride and anti-Semitism” (Robert Lee).1 Or, as Eric W. Hayden has capsulized things on a more positive note: “Living the Victorious Life.”2 Key Verses: 15 & 17 — “For the day of the Lord is near upon all the heathen: as thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee: thy reward shall return upon thine own head … But upon Mount Zion shall be deliverance, and there shall be holiness; and the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions.”

Introduction

Obadiah, whose name means “servant of Jehovah,” is the oldest and the shortest of the Old Testament prophetical writings. Nothing whatsoever is known of Obadiah himself. Though there are several Obadiahs mentioned in the Old Testament, there is no evidence to indicate that any of them wrote this book. Furthermore, it is difficult to date this brief prophecy, which dating hinges on the interpretation of verses 11-14.

Some think that the reference here is to the events in the days of Jehoram (2 Chron. 21:16-17), while others relate these verses to events in the days of Ahaz (2 Chron. 28:17). Still others link the passage with

Jeremiah 49:14-16, making these two prophets contemporaries.

W. Graham Scroggie contends for the early date of about 586 B.C.,3 while Merrill F. Unger places the book during the reign of Jehoram (c. 848-41 B.C.).4 At that time the Philistines and Arabians invaded Judah and plundered Jerusalem (2 Chron. 21:16-17; Joel 3:3-6; Amos 1:6). At that time the Edomites were also the bitter enemies of Judah (2 Kings 8:20-22; 2 Chron. 21:8-10). Through a comparison of references in both prophecies, Amos reveals an acquaintance with Obadiah (cf. v. 4 with Amos 9:2; vv. 9, 10 & 18 with Amos 9:12; v. 20 with Amos 9:14). Jeremiah apparently used this prophecy also (cf. vv. 1-6 with Jer. 49:7-22). This gives additional support for dating the book early.

To understand the prophecy of Obadiah one must know about the age-long conflict between Jacob and Esau, even at their birth (Gen. 25:22-23). Obadiah is in two parts, one part dealing with Edom and the other with Israel, and it was from these twin boys — Jacob and Esau — that these two nations sprang. Esau's descendants, the Edomites or Idumeans, were a proud, bitter, resentful people, seeking at every opportunity to harm Israel, Jacob's descendants. At first the Edomites were governed by dukes, and then by kings (Gen. 36). At the time of Israel's exodus from Egypt, the Edomites were in their golden age and they refused Israel passage through their territory when Jacob's descendants were on their way to Canaan (Num. 20:18). When Nebuchadnezzar sacked Jerusalem, Edom rejoiced over Israel's downfall and cruelly took part in the plundering and massacre (cf. Psa. 137:7). However, their rejoicing was brief, for within four years Nebuchadnezzar invaded

Edom and completely overthrew the nation. Later, Cyrus, king of Persia, overcame them, and the Edomites received still another crushing defeat by the Jews under the Maccabees. Edomite hostility was still evidenced in the time of Christ when Herod the Great, an Idumean and descendant of the Edomites, sought to slay the infant Christ. Slowly the nation disappeared until their very name perished.

In Obadiah's day the capital of Edom was Sela (Petra), the rock city which, although now desolate, still remains one of the wonders of the world. In their natural fortress-stronghold the Edomites thought their city was impregnable, but they did not reckon on the power of God.

Actually, the last remnants of the Edomites were wiped out in 70 A.D., helping to defend Jerusalem against the Romans.

It is impossible today for anyone to trace his ancestory back to the Edomites. While it is true that the territory of the Edomites comes back into focus in the last days, it will be the residents of that old territory whom the Lord Jesus Christ shall judge (Isa. 63:1-6). It is apparent that in a coming day the nation occupying the Edomites' land will side with the armies of the Antichrist against the Jews, as once the Edomites themselves sided with Nebuchadnezzar. However, as seen from the prophecy of Obadiah the ultimate victory will be Israel's.

Outline

The major themes of the book of Obadiah may be outlined in several ways. The two outlines which follow suggest the overall subject matter of this brief prophecy:

1. The Shame of Edom (vv. 1-9)

2. The Sin of Edom (vv. 10-14)

3. The Sentence of Edom (vv. 15-21)

4. Edom's Punishment (vv. 1-6)

5. Israel's Possession (vv. 17-21)

Notable Notes

This short prophecy of Obadiah has a twofold practical message: 1. a warning against sinful pride and godless defiance (v. 3); and 2. a warning against anti-Semitism, for God Himself will undertake the cause of the Jews and will destroy their enemies.

The words of verses 17 & 18 are a gospel gem: deliverance, sanctification, enrichment and victory.

In verse 21, which concludes the book, there is a beautiful prophetic statement: "The kingdom shall be the Lord's."

In the book of Obadiah the LORD JESUS CHRIST is revealed as the SAVIOUR and as JEHOVAH'S PERFECT SERVANT, reminding us of Mark's Gospel wherein the same themes are paramount (see Mark 10:45).

1 Robert Lee, The Outlined Bible.

2 Eric W. Hayden, Preaching Through the Bible, p. 138.

3 W. Graham Scroggie, Know Your Bible, I, p. 207.

4 Merrill F. Unger, Unger's Bible Dictionary, p. 802.

Jonah

From the Editor’s Notebook

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Outline Studies of the Minor Prophets

Jonah: The Book of Missionary Enterprise

Key Word: Commission.

Message: “God, the God of the Gentiles as well as of the Jew” (Robert Lee)1 Or, as Eric W. Hayden has summarized Jonah’s primary theme: “The Importance of Missionary Enterprise.”2 Key Verses: 4:2 — “And he prayed unto the Lord, and said, I pray thee, O Lord, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tar-shish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.”

Introduction

Jonah has rightly been called the “Onesimus” of the Old Testament. Onesemus was able to run away from his master, but Jonah, while he sought to flee from the responsible commission of the Lord, could never flee from God’s presence, not even in the inward parts of a great fish.

Regarding the book itself, W. Graham Scroggie has commented: “This Book is not really a prophecy, but the history of a prophet. With the exception of chapter ii, it is straight-forward narrative, telling of Jonah’s commmission to Ninevah, and what he did with it.”3 The book forms one of the battlegrounds of modern

destructive criticism. Many simply consider it an allegory, with no historical background whatsoever. However, it takes far less faith to accept the book as an excerpt from Jonah's history than to believe the far-fetched hypotheses of several so-called scholars or higher critics. That Jonah was a true historical person is verified by 2 Kings 14:25, coupled with the more important verification of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself (Matt. 12:39-41; 16:4; Luke 11:29-30). The book of Jonah is fact, not fiction; history, not fable.

Jonah himself was of Gathhepher, near Nazareth, and therefore a Galilean. Thus the Pharisees were either ignorant of the Scriptures or lying when they said, "out of Galilee ariseth no prophet" (John 7:52). Nahum and Malachi were also of Galilee. Jonah was a prophet of the Northern Kingdom during its most prosperous period, and it is evident from 2 Kings 14:25 that he carried out his ministry during the reign of Jeroboam II (c. 825-782 B.C.). He commenced his prophetic career as Elisha closed his. In fact, some ancient Jewish authorities were of the opinion that Jonah was the widow of Zarephath's son, whom Elijah raised from the dead. He was a fully accredited prophet, one of his prophecies having been preserved in 2 Kings 14:25-27, and was a contemporary with Hosea and Amos.

Actually, the book of Jonah is autobiographical and its object seems to have been to correct the extreme form of Jewish nationalism which then prevailed, as well as to proclaim the mercy of God for both Jews and Gentiles alike. Jonah disobeyed the Lord because he was afraid that if he preached to Ninevah, the great Assyrian city, it would be spared and in turn the Assyrians would

conquer Israel, since Assyria at that time was one of Israel's most feared enemies.

Jonah is a clear type of the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 12:38-42), even as he is also a type of the nation Israel. Somewhere in his writings, E. W. Bullinger has commented: "Jonah is God's ambassador sent to preach repentance to the Gentiles. So was Israel. He objects to Gentiles being thus blessed, and flees from the unpleasant task. He is visited by a divinely sent storm, and is thrown into the sea. So Israel is now cast into the sea of nations; but, like Jonah, is not lost, for presently Israel will be cast up on the earth, and become the ambassadors of Jehovah, and the conveyors of blessing to the Gentiles."

Outline

1. The Prodigal Prophet (1)

2. The Praying Prophet (2)

3. The Preaching Prophet (3)

4. The Pouting Prophet (4)

Notable Notes

Of Jonah's narrative A. E. Bell has said, "This book is the great foreign missionary sermon of the Old Testament."4 Along this same line, Scroggie has stated: "That the Book may, and indeed, does, have all allegorical significance, we do not question. It is prophetic in outlook and catholic in spirit. Its subject is not a 'whale,' but Foreign Missions. The Book illustrates Faber's great lines:

'There's a wideness in God's mercy

Like the wideness of the sea;

There's a kindness in His justice

Which is more than liberty.'"5

The book of Jonah is as singular among Old Testament writings as the Epistle of James is among New Testament writings. In a setting of law and God's purposes concerning Israel, the former book shows the Lord's heart of compassion toward the Gentiles; whereas in a setting of grace and God's purposes with respect to Christ and the Church, the latter book shows that God has not forgotten the Jews. In the book of Jonah, then, the Gentiles are in view; while the Letter of James is addressed to the twelve tribes in dispersion.

Jonah and Daniel were especially chosen by the Lord to direct their messages to the Gentiles in Old Testament times, even as the Apostle Paul was divinely chosen in a special way to go and preach to the Gentiles in New Testament times.

The greatest miracle of the book is not Jonah's preservation in the inward parts of a great fish, but the repentance of a great city like Ninevah at the preaching of one man. The people of Ninevah are a classic example of genuine repentance, even as it is significant to note that there were more than 120,000 children in the city.

That Jonah knew the Old Testament Scriptures is evident from his unusual prayer uttered from the inside of history's strangest prayer room, for several of the statements recorded by God's servant are quotations from the Psalms.

It is interesting to note how Jonah has captured the interest of the common man. Almost any child on the

street knows that “Jonah is the man who was swallowed by the whale,” even if that may be the extent of his or her knowledge of the Bible. In popular usage anyone who brings you so-called “bad luck” is a “Jonah.” He is probably referred to by secular sources more than any other Old Testament character.

In fact, some just take Jonah for granted, as in the old roadside sign which read:

“The whale put Jonah down the hatch;

But coughed him up, because he scratched!

Burma Shave.”

On the subject of the possibility of Jonah being swallowed by a great fish, perhaps a whale, there is excellent and conclusive literature. After all, if man can devise a ‘metal fish’ — a submarine — driven by nuclear energy and capable of remaining submerged weeks at a time with a crew of some hundred or more men, who is man to deny God, the Creator of the universe, the ability to create and prepare a great fish to swallow His disobedient prophet for three days and three nights?

In the book entitled, The Cruise of the Cachalot by Frank T. Bullen, there is record of a piece of matter ejected from the stomach of a whale the whale-fisher author himself had helped to kill which was estimated to measure “8 feet x 6 feet x 6 feet.”

Furthermore, there are numerous accounts thoroughly authenticated of men who have been swallowed by whales, or by Rhindon Typicus commonly called the whale-shark. An English sailor was swallowed by a whale-shark in the English Channel, and after the capture of the giant fish two days and two nights later

he was found inside, unconscious but alive, and he lived to advertise himself as the Jonah of the Twentieth Century. In similar fashion, a sailor by the name of James Bartley of the whaling ship, Star of the East, was thrown into the water when his boat was upset by the struggles of a harpooned whale. His shipmates searched for his body without success only to find him many, many hours later as they dismembered the whale, alive but a raving lunatic. At the end of the third week he had completely recovered from his ordeal and resumed his duties.

The city of Ninevah now in ruins, was discovered in 1845. It is believed to have been founded by Nimrod (Gen. 10:11). In Jonah's day it was 90 miles in circumference and contained a population of around 600,000. Thus the Scriptures, the Saviour, and the archaeologist's spade all testify to the city's historicity and the authority of Jonah's record.

Among other things, the book of Jonah serves as a contrast between the selfish unbelief and vindictiveness of man and the gracious benevolence and patience of God.

In the book of Jonah the LORD JESUS CHRIST is revealed as THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE.

1 Robert Lee, The Outlined Bible.

2 Eric W. Hayden, Preaching Through the Bible, p. 142.

3 W. Graham Scroggie, Know Your Bible, 1, p. 158.

4 A. E. Bell, The Gist of the Bible, p. 85.

5 Scroggie, op. cit., p. 159.

Micah

From the Editor’s Notebook

Outline Studies of the Minor Prophets

Micah: The Book of Divine Requirements

Key Word: Hear.

Message: “God’s 1. Hatred of Injustice. 2. Hatred of Ritualism. 3. Delight in Pardoning” (Robert Lee).1 Key Verses: 6:8 — “He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” 7:18 — “Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He retaineth not His anger forever, because He delighteth in mercy.”

Introduction

The name Micah means “Who is like Jehovah?” It has the same derivation as the name Michael, which means “Who is like God?” What we know of the man Micah is found in 1:1, although through the medium of his message we are able to discern his personal qualities and his power as a preacher. He was a native of Moresheth, a small village about 20 miles southwest of Jerusalem near Gath in northern Philistia (cf. 1:14). He was contemporary with Isaiah in the Southern Kingdom and Hosea in the Northern Kingdom, having prophesied in the days of Jotham (750-736 B.C.), Ahaz (743-716 B.C.), and Hezekiah (716-687 B.C.) of the Southern Kingdom, and thus during the reigns of Pekah and Hoshea of the Northern Kingdom. These reigns cover a

period of 60 years and were marked by political unrest and social decay. Micah is the only prophet whose ministry was directed to both Israel and Judah, the degenerate conditions in these kingdoms having served to mold his message. He was younger than Isaiah, his prophecy having been called by some a “miniature Isaiah,” or “Isaiah in shorthand,” in view of the striking similarities.

It has been suggested that Micah would have made a good 20th century war correspondent since his style is rapid, bold, vivid, incisive and reportorial. At the same time his manner of expression was touching and tender.

Comparing Micah and Isaiah, Dr. Merrill F. Unger (my Hebrew professor in the early 50s) has said: “Micah’s prophecy is a beautiful and moving example of classical Heb. poetry. Like his contemporary, Isaiah, Micah possessed great literary power. While Isaiah was a court poet, Micah was a rustic from an obscure village. Isaiah was a statesman; Micah, an evangelist and social reformer. Isaiah was a voice to kings; Micah, a herald for God to the common people. Isaiah adressed himself to political questions; Micah dealt almost entirely with personal religion and social morality.”2 It is evident that Micah’s messages helped bring about the great spiritual awakening in Judah during the reign of Hezekiah (cf. Jer. 26:18), and it must have been a great comfort to Isaiah to have his witness supported by such an able and devoted contemporary as Micah.

Micah’s preaching was directed to every class for, as W. Graham Scroggie has commented, “No class was exempt from the prevailing corrupting influences: princes, priests, prophets, and people were all victims of social

disorder and moral decay (ii. 2, 8, 9, 11; iii. 1-3, 5, 11). Micah shows that, notwithstanding this state of things, they clung to religious ordinances and spiritual forms, and he exposes the futility of this (vi. 7, 8).”3

Outline

1. The Prophecy of Impending Judgment (1-3)

2. The Promise of Messiah’s Kingdom (4-5)

3. The Plea for Present Repentance (6-7)

Or, Micah’s prophecy may be divided under two simple headings:

1. Denunciation (1-3)

2. Consolation (4-7)

Notable Notes

The scope of Micah’s prophecy is such that he takes us from the gloom of impending judgment to the glories of Christ’s millennial reign; from Bethlehem to the Day of the Lord Jesus.

Micah’s book reveals a rather remarkable prophecy regarding Jerusalem in 3:12, fulfilled in the destruction of the city in 586 B.C. In contrast, the future glory of the Holy City is foretold in chapter 4. Micah pinpoints the birthplace of Christ in 5:2 and, as the liberal-minded Dean A. P. Stanley (1815-1881) has acknowledged, the book unfolds “one of the most sublime and impassioned declarations of spiritual religion that the Old Testament contains,” referring to 6:6-8. Of 7:18 & 19, Dr. A. T. Pierson has commented: “…a little poem of twelve lines in the Hebrew … one of the most exquisite things to be found in the entire Old Testament, and would alone be

sufficient to prove that this Bible is the Word of God, for there is nothing like it in all the literature of men."

To Micah, God was everything, this prophet of old having had an exalted conception of the holiness, righteousness and compassion of the Lord. From his prophecy as a whole, it is evident that he was a man of power with God, one who possessed the peace of God, a man of sound judgment, tenderhearted yet faithful, giving God the credit for everything (cf. 3:8).

Micah has been honoured by being quoted on three occasions elsewhere in the Bible:

1. By the elders of the land, issuing in the preservation of Jeremiah's life (Jer. 26:18 with Micah 3:12).

2. By the Magi arriving at Jerusalem (Matt. 2:5-6 with Micah 5:2).

3. By the Lord Jesus Christ when sending out His twelve disciples (Matt. 10:35-36 with Micah 7:6). Of Micah's ministry, Scroggie has said: "It was no easy task which Micah had, but he brought to it strong qualities and a great belief in God and righteousness. He tears aside the veil which hid their sin and shame from view, and he denounces their iniquities in scathing terms. In short sharp sentences he brings his whip down upon the venal judges, the corrupt priests, and the hireling prophets, and makes them smart beneath the lash. He tells them also of coming judgment (iii. 12; iv. 10; 16). But, like his prophet brothers, he looks beyond, to a time of restoration. In the storm he sang a song; in the night he caught a glimpse of the morning. With his threats are mingled promises (iv. 1-8; cf. i. 9-16, v. 7, 8; iii. 6, 7, 12; with ii. 12; iv. 10; v. 8, 6)."4 In his closing comments on Micah's prophecy, John Phillips states: "Micah liked to

play on words, employing as puns the names of Gath, Aphrah, Saphir, Zaanan, and Beth-ezel, various towns he mentions. Indeed he concludes his prophecy with a pun on his own name, Micah, which means ‘Who is like Jehovah?’ He concludes with the challenge, ‘Who is God like unto thee?’ The more we get to know of this great and living God, the more we shall appreciate the parting thrust of Micah.”5 In Micah’s prophecy the LORD JESUS CHRIST is revealed as THE SOURCE OF BLESSING and THE WITNESS AGAINST REBELLIOUS NATIONS.

1 Robert Lee, The Outlined Bible.

2 Merrill F. Unger, Unger’s Bible Handbook, p. 148.

3 W. Graham Scroggie, Know Your Bible I, p. 177.

4 Ibid., pp. 177-78.

5 John Phillips, Exploring the Scriptures, p. 140.

Nahum

From the Editor’s Notebook

W. Ross Rainey

Outline Studies of the Minor Prophets

Nahum: The Book of God’s Wrath

Key Word: Doom.

Message: “The Awful Doom of the Apostate” (Robert Lee).1 Or, as Dr. Merrill F. Unger has interpretively summarized Nahum’s message: “The prophet has one theme, judgment upon Nineveh, the capital of the mighty Assyrian Empire … and hence of Assyria, the ‘giant among the Semites.’”2 Key Verses: 1:3 — “The Lord is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked: the Lord hath His way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of His feet.” 1:8 & 9: “But with an overrunning flood He will make an utter end of the place thereof, and darkness shall pursue His enemies. What do ye imagine against the Lord? He will make an utter end: affliction shall not rise up the second time.”

Introduction

In a sense, the book of Nahum is the continuation of the book of Jonah. The prophet’s message was given some 150 years after Jonah’s and, like Jonah’s message, was directed to the great fortress city of Nineveh in Assyria. Under Jonah’s preaching Nineveh’s repentance was brought about, while Nahum predicted the great city’s utter ruin.

What we know about the prophet Nahum is found in 1:1. He was a native of Elkosh (its location is unknown today). Interestingly enough, there was a city by that name just a few miles north of Nineveh's ruins. Nahum could have lived there and from that city prophesied to Nineveh, much as Daniel did to Babylon later on. However, tradition asserts that Nahum was a Galilean like Jonah. A meaning given for Capernaum is the "village of Nahum," and if Capernaum is a Hebrew word, then this is the evident origin.

The name Nahum means "compassion" or "consolation," some having thought that his name is an abbreviation of Nehemiah. The dates between which Nahum prophesied are 663 B.C., when Thebes fell (Nahum 3:8-10), and 606 B.C., when Nineveh fell. It is estimated that the prophecy belongs to around the year 650 B.C., having been fufilled to the letter some 44 years later. After the Assyrian invasion and the captivity of the Northern Kingdom, Nahum escaped into Judah and probably lived in Jerusalem, having witnessed the siege of the Holy City and the destruction of the Assyrian hosts when in one night 185,000 perished (cf. 2 Kings 18 & 19). Nahum was contemporary with Isaiah and Hezekiah.

While this brief prophecy bears a message of divine doom and wrath against Nineveh, it is at the same time one of great comfort to any and all of God's people who live in fear of a powerful and godless nation. On this very theme, W. Graham Scroggie has written: "NAHUM is a book which should bring much comfort in these days to all lovers of righteousness. In our time, as then, proud civilizations, so-called, are staking everything upon the strength of their fighting power on land and sea and in the air, and their boast, as we might expect, is

characterized by a monstrous disregard of God, His righteousness and sovereignty; but again as long ago, men and nations will have to learn that God is on the Throne, and that 'His kingdom ruleth over all.'"3 Nahum's prophecy has been described as one great "at last." Of his prophecy, Robert Lee has said: "Nahum forms a beautiful, vivid, pictorial poem on the grandeur, power, and justice of God, and on the conflict between Jehovah and this cruel and defiant world empire of Nineveh."4 An anonymous prophetic student has commented: "None of the minor prophets seem to equal Nahum in boldness, ardour, and sublimity. His prophecy forms a regular, perfect poem; the exordium is not merely magnificent, it is truly majestic; the preparation for the destruction of Nineveh, and the description of its downfall and desolation, are expressed in the most vivid colours, and are bold and luminous in the highest degree."

The key phrase of Nahum is "utter end" (1:8-9).

Outline

1. The Judge (1:1-7)

2. The Judgment (1:8-3:19)

—Robert Lee5

1. Judgment upon Nineveh declared (1)

2. Judgment upon Nineveh described (2)

3. Judgment Upon Nineveh Defended (3)

—W. Graham Scroggie6

Notable Notes

As to the city itself, Nineveh seemed an impregnable fortress. Located on the left bank of the Tigris River, the walls of this great Assyrian city rose 100 feet into the air and were further strengthened by more than 1,200 mighty towers. Furthermore, the city was protected on three sides by a moat leading to the Tigris. The walls of Nineveh enclosed 1,800 acres, and the massiveness of the walls were such that they were wide enough for three chariots to drive abreast on them. There were at least 15 gates leading into the city, coupled with the fact that its circumference measured 60 miles. In case of a siege Nineveh could maintain its own food supply from within the city itself. Nineveh owed its chief renown to Sennacherib (2 Kings 19), who built a majestic palace at Kuyunjik and an arsenal at Nebi-Yunus, and also laid out a park. Esarhaddon, a younger son of Sennacherib, widened the streets and built a palace at Nebi-Yunus. The fall of Nineveh was predicted by both Nahum and Zephaniah, the city's overthrow and destruction having been brought about by the Medes and Babylonians in 606 B.C.

Another great city mentioned in Nahum was Thebes. The No of Nahum 3:8, Jeremiah 46:25 and Ezekiel 30:14-16, is Thebes, the ancient capital of Upper Egypt. It was located on the banks of the Nile River, 450 miles from Cairo. Of prehistoric foundation, it provided the 11th and 12th dynasty kings, and after the expulsion of the Hyksos it flourished again. It was said to have had 100 gates.

By his prophecy Nahum brought comfort to a harassed and fearful people (cf. 1:7, 12-13), even as God's prophet

served to warn all godless nations that ultimately all God can do with an apostate people and nation is to destroy them.

In describing the wrath of God, Nahum uses seven different words: jealousness, venegeance, wrath, anger, indignation, fierceness and fury. However, Nahum's prophecy is not vindictive. On the contrary, it stresses that God's wrath must be interpreted by His love. Where there is divine love there will always be righteous indignation against sin, and where there is anger there will always be love for the sinner.

In 606 B.C. the invasion of Nineveh was made possible by the swollen waters of the Tigris River flooding a part of the city. Nahum foretold this in 2:6. The city was then given over to fire as described in 3:13-15. Nineveh's fate had long been delayed, but over its ruin might well be written the words: "The mills of God grind slowly, but they grind exceedingly small." So thorough was God's judgment of the city that for centuries the place where it had once stood was not known.

The words of Nahum 1:15a —"Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good things, that publisheth peace!" — are applied by the Apostle Paul to the Gospel of Christ in Romans 10:15.

In 3:1, Nahum refers to Nineveh as "the bloody city."

Nahum 1:7 is one of the choicest texts in all the Bible: "The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and He knoweth them that trust in Him."

In the book of Nahum the LORD JESUS CHRIST is revealed as our "STRONGHOLD IN THE DAY OF TROUBLE."

The Annual Meeting

The Annual Meeting of FOOD FOR THE FLOCK INC. was held in Toronto on Saturday, October 25th, 1986. Among other things, the committee made a decision to continue publication of “Food for the Flock” magazine as our Lord enables us to do so.

For the first time in my twelve years as editor, I was unable to attend the meeting because of the serious illness of my father, Mr. George Rainey. At that time it appeared our Lord might take him “Home,” but presently as I write (Nov. 13th) his condition has stabilized, although he remains quite weak. The continued prayers of the saints on his behalf are much appreciated.

—W. Ross Rainey

1 Robert Lee, The Outlined Bible.

2 Merrill F. Unger, Unger’s Bible Handbook, p. 423.

3 W. Graham Scroggie, Know Your Bible, I, pp. 181-82.

4 Lee, op. cit.

5 Ibid.

6 Scroggie, op. cit., p. 183.

Habakkuk

From the Editor’s Notebook

W. Ross Rainey

Outline Studies of the Minor Prophets

Habakkuk: The Book of Faith’s Problems

Key Word: Justice.

Message: “God’s consistency with Himself in view of permitted evil” (Robert Lee)1. Or, as Eric W. Hayden has highlighted Habakkuk’s message: “Living the Life of Faith.”2 Key Verse: 2:4 — “Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.”

Introduction

Virtually nothing is known of Habakkuk himself, although his life’s testimony is reflected in the meaning of his name, “clinging” or “embracing,” as illustrated in Genesis 33:4 where Esau embraced his brother Jacob after twenty years of separation. He has been called “the doubting Thomas of the Old Testament,” “the grandfather of the Reformation,” “the prophet of faith,” and “the free-thinker among the prophets.” Had they known each other, there is no question but what Habakkuk and Job would have been bosom friends. It’s evident that he lived in the period of the rise of the neo-Babylonian Empire (c. 625 B.C.), for the Chaldean invasion of Judah was threatening (1:5-6) and the iniquity of Judah was increasing. He was contemporary with Jeremiah at home and with Daniel abroad, having

undoubtedly prophesied in the reigns of Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim. The state of things recorded in 1:2-4 coincides with the conditions in Jehoiakim's time, and the threatened invasion of the Chaldeans (i.e., the Babylonians) answers to the facts recorded in 2 Kings 24 and 25.

It has been suggested that Habakkuk seems more concerned with solving a problem than with delivering a message. Nevertheless, we can learn a valuable lesson from him, for when he was faced with a seemingly unsolvable problem, he took it to God instead of forsaking his faith as some would do and have done.

Habakkuk's problem centres on the same theme taken up by the psalmist in Psalm 73, and that is, why a just, holy and omnipotent God at times permits the wicked to flourish and the righteous to suffer at their hands. In other words, the theological question at stake is how God's patience with evil can square with his righteousness. With Job the problem was personal; with Habakkuk it was national. Having learned that the Chaldean nation was merely a tool employed by God to chasten Judah for its own shameful cruelties and the idolatry of the days of the wicked kings, Manasseh and Amon, the prophet's perplexity was only intensified. How could God punish a nation by a less righteous nation? It is well to remember that war is God's scourge, and with it He chastens rebellious nations. Habakkuk's problem is perennial and it is as pertinent today as it was in his day. The answer to his problem is disclosed in the key text of 2:4, the main thrust of this brief prophecy showing how God's troubled prophet took his doubts and difficulties to the Lord and how he found his answer.

J. Vernon McGee says of Habakkuk that “he had a question mark for a brain.”3 It’s certainly true that the prophet begins his book with a question mark (1:3), but he closes it with an exclamation mark (3:18-19).

While Jonah related his personal experience in prose, Habakkuk related his in poetry. Dr. Merrill F. Unger has written: “Habakkuk, like Nahum and Isaiah, is couched in sublime poetry, reflecting the classical era of Heb. prophecy. The magnificent lyric ode of ch. 3 contains one of the greatest descriptions of the theophany in relation to the coming of the Lord which has been given by the Holy Spirit, awaiting fulfillment in the day of the Lord (cf. 2 Thess. 1:7-10).”4

Outline

1. Faith Tried (1)

2. Faith Taught (2)

3. Faith Triumphant (3)

Another simple way of outlining this brief book is:

1. Habakukk’s Perplexity (1)

2. Habakukk’s Perception (2)

3. Habakkuk’s Prayer (3)

Martin Luther has given a very striking definition of Habakkuk’s name, which can hardly be improved on. “Habakkuk signifies an embracer, or one who embraces another, takes him into his arms. He embraces his people, and takes them to his arms, i.e., he comforts them and holds them up, as one embraces a weeping child, to quiet it with the assurance that if God wills it shall soon be better.”

What Habakkuk writes concerning himself, which is very little, explains the resemblance of his prophecy to the book of Psalms. He was not only a prophet (1:1), but also one of the Levitical choristers in the temple (3:19). His description of the majesty and self-revelation of God in chapter 3 stands supreme, and the fact that the whole of the book is written in a strongly lyrical character makes its structure nearer to the Psalms than any other of the prophetical writings.

The book of Habakkuk is unique in that two-thirds of it is conversation between the prophet and his Lord.

Habakkuk's prophecy must have been among the Apostle Paul's favourite Old Testament books, for in the New Testament he quotes from it three times, that is, if Paul was indeed the human author of the Letter to the Hebrews (cf. Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38). To this might be added the fact that in Romans 1:17 the emphasis is on the word "just"; in Galatians 3:11 it is on "faith"; while in Hebrews 10:38 it is on "live."

W. Graham Scroggie has said of Habakkuk that "His first complaint is because of the apostasy of Judah, and his second is that the Lord could and would use as the instrument of chastisement such a wicked people as the Chaldeans. The Divine reply to the latter complaint is the heart of the Book (ii. 4). It announces the Divine principle of righteousness which, in effect, is 'The unjust shall die: the just shall live.' This principle is applied, first to the Chaldeans (ii. 5-20), and then to Judah (ch. iii.). In the first application a five-fold 'Woe' is pronounced against the Chaldeans, and the second application is a sublime Theophany and its effect. The text of the effect (ii. 16-19) is one of the finest things in

the Bible."5 Habakkuk begins his prophecy with a sob, but ends with a song; he opens in gloom, but ends in glory.

Since there has never been a darker hour in the history of the world, God's people need to read Habakkuk's message in these confused, complex, crisis times in which we live today. He reminds us that God is still on the throne, and that no matter what the outward appearances may be, His sovereign, all-wise and loving purposes cannot be thwarted.

Deep in unfathomable mines

Of never-failing skill,

He treasures up His bright designs

And works His sovereign will.

In the book of Habakkuk the LORD JESUS CHRIST is revealed as THE GOD OF MY SALVATION.

Important Notice

Effective on May 1st the price of a one-year subscription to "Food for the Flock" will be increased to $10.00. This decision was made by the committee at the Annual Meeting in Toronto last October 25th, primarily in view of higher mailing costs and a current deficit.

Apart from personal gifts through supportive saints, it would not have been possible over the years to continue to print and mail the magazine. If presently, or when you renew your subscription, our Lord would lay it upon your heart to further assist us in a practical way, the same will be much appreciated as well as serve as a genuine encouragement as we seek to "press on."

Kind and interested friends, plus missionaries and home workers, have frequently expressed to me that they do not want to see the magazine cease publication, believing that it has a vital even if small role in assembly witness, and this, for the past 32 years. As a committee we are dedicated to continuing this avenue of written ministry, at the same time praying earnestly that our Lord through His people will see fit to provide our needs to that end.

—The Editor

1 Robert Lee, The Outlined Bible.

2 Eric W. Hayden, Preaching through the Bible, p. 155.

3 J. Vernon McGee, Briefing the Bible, p. 59.

4 Merrill F. Unger, Unger's Bible Handbook, p. 425.

5 W. Graham Scroggie, Know Your Bible, I, pp. 195-96.

Zephaniah

From the Editor’s Notebook

W. Ross Rainey

Outline Studies of the Minor Prophets

Zephaniah: The Book of God’s Severity and Goodness

Key Word: Jealousy.

Message: “I, the Lord thy God, am a Jealous God” (Robert Lee).1 Key Verses: 2:4 — “Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the Lord’s wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of His jealousy: for He shall make even a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land.” 3:8 — “Therefore wait ye upon me, saith the Lord, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour out them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy.” 3:17 —“The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; He will save, He will rejoice over thee with joy; He will rest in His love, He will joy over thee with singing.”

Introduction

At least a little more is known of Zephaniah than of many of the other Old Testament prophets (1:1). He was undoubtedly the great-great-grandson of the good and godly Hezekiah, king of Judah, thus making him a prince of that royal house. He exercised his prophetic ministry

during the reign of Josiah (640-608 B.C.), and it is quite probable that his words were instrumental in bringing about the revival which took place in the eighteenth year of that king's rule (2 Kings 22:23; 2 Chron. 34-35). However, with the impending captivity of Judah, this particular spiritual movement proved superficial. It is estimated that Zephaniah ministered between Nahum and Jeremiah, probably having been contemporary with both. It is evident that he had access to the royal court and had a very definite influence on Josiah's policies.

Zephaniah's name means "he whom Jehovah hides" or "Jehovah is hidden." Perhaps he had his name in mind when he wrote the words of 2:3, saying, "Seek the Lord, all ye meek of the earth, who have kept His ordinances; seek righteousness. seek meekness; it may be ye shall be hidden in the day of the Lord's anger."

Of the book itself, W. Graham Scroggie has said: "This Prophecy reflects the dark days which followed the reigns of Manasseh and Anion. It follows the main prophetic line, denouncing sin, pronouncing judgment, and announcing restoration. These predictions refer not only to the Chosen People, but also to the nations, as in ISAIAH and EZEKIEL. The whole earth is the theatre where the Divine Judge displays the grandeur of His law and the glory of His love.

"The dominating note of this Book is 'The Day of the Lord,' an expression which, in all the Prophetic Writings, points to a time of judgment."2 Zephaniah's prophecies were primarily pronouncements of wrath to come, and within the short scope of his book he mentions "the day of the Lord" some 20 times. He saw in the ravages of the Scythian hordes, pouring down upon the neighboring

nations, a harbinger of the deserved judgment of Judah because of her sins, and which judgment the nation would receive in full in “the day of the Lord.” Like Jeremiah, Zephaniah’s clear prophetic vision included other nations besides Judah. Insofar as striking the keynote of “the day of the Lord” is concerned, he stands right alongside the prophet Joel.

Outline

1. The Judgment of Judah and Jerusalem (1)

2. The Judgment of the Nations (2:1-3:8)

3. The Joys of the Coming Kingdom (3:9-20)

Notable Notes

Though its descriptions are vivid, from a literary point of view Zephaniah is considerably inferior, for instance, to Nahum.

In addition to the well-known Old Testament expression, “the day of the Lord,” another striking phrase used by Zephaniah is “in the midst” (2:14; 3:5, 11, 12, 15, 17). However, the key word is “jealousy,” though its meaning here is not to be taken in its generally understood meaning. There is that jealousy which is always suspicious of faithfulness, and continually on the lookout for evidence of the sane, but there is another kind of jealousy which is the outcome of God’s jealousy. As Robert Lee says of God: “He so loves His people that He cannot bear a rival, and must have their wholehearted devotion; and He will do everything He can to secure this, even going to the length of awful judgments, as here.”3 While Zephaniah begins in an atmosphere of gloom, he ends in an atmosphere of gladness. From

1:1-3:8 there is nothing but sighing, yet God's faithful prophet ends his message with singing, this last section (3:9-20) containing "the sweetest love song in the Old Testament."4 In this book it is interesting to see how God asserts His sovereignty both in terms of judgment (1:2-4) and in terms of mercy (3:18-20), the emphasis in both these passages being on the divine assertion, "I will."

Joel, Hosea, Amos, Micah, Isaiah, and other prophets in addition to Zephaniah make mention of "the day of the Lord." It is toward this period in God's prophetic program that world events are moving swiftly today. This same theme is picked up and stressed in the New Testament in 2 Thessalonians 2.

Two contrasted passages in Zephaniah are worthy of special note — namely, 1:14-18, describing judgment, and 3:14-17, describing blessing.

Zephaniah has been called, "The Compendiuni of All Prophecy." Though addressed to Judah and Jerusalem, the book may be thought of as a survey of God's universal government.

A key verse in Zephaniah, as pointed out at the beginning of this study, is 3:17. It bears a glorious message which may be outlined as follows:

1. GOD'S PRESENCE — "The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty."

2. GOD'S POWER — "He will save."

3. GOD'S PLEASURE — "He will rejoice over thee with joy."

4. GOD'S PROVISION — "He will rest in His love."

5. GOD’S PROCLAMATION —”He will joy over thee with singing.”

In Zephaniah the LORD JESUS CHRIST is revealed as our JEALOUS LORD.

1 Robert Lee, The Outlined Bible.

2 W. Graham Scroggie, Know Your Bible, I, p.p. 184-85.

3 Lee, op, cit.

4 Ibid.

Haggai

From the Editor’s Notebook

W. Ross Rainey

Outline Studies of the Minor Prophets

Haggai: The Book of Action

Key Word: Consider.

Message: “God First in Life and Service” (Robert Lee).1 Or, as Walter A. Elwell has stated: “The basic message of the book of Haggai is simple: our spiritual state is more important than our material state. We must make a home for God, whether on a hill (then) or in our hearts (now), if we expect God to bless us.”2 Key Verse: 1:7 — “Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Consider your ways.”

Introduction

There are six books of the Old Testament,” wrote Dr. Harry A. Ironside, “which may be read together most profitably. I refer to Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther, of the historical part of the Bible, coupled with the prophetic messages of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. To these a seventh might be added, viz., the book of Daniel, showing the exercises of soul which led up to the restoration.”

Ezra was concerned with the return of a remnant in Israel to Jerusalem from the Persian captivity. Separation, restoration and consecration are some of the major themes in his book. Nehemiah called for complete separation, along with the restoration and rebuilding of the walls and gates of Jerusalem. This work

was begun 14 years after Ezra had returned to the Holy City. The book of Esther unfolds God's gracious care over His people who chose to remain in a foreign land rather than return to Jerusalem, which was God's centre for all Israel and the city where He had placed His name.

Unfortunately, with the passing of time the evils which had been shut out by the wall of separation infiltrated to the inside. As a result, God raised up Haggai and Zechariah to point the people back to Himself. Zechariah, who had been called "the prophet of glory," spoke of the glories to come; whereas Haggai addressed the consciences of the people regarding the evil conditions among them, calling them back to paths of holiness, with the result of blessing through obedience. Malachi followed a generation later and bewailed the complete breakdown of the people, all serving as a definite warning that if God's people are not in subjection to the truth and practicing it, the truth alone will not keep them.

Haggai is mentioned in Ezra 5:1 and 6:14, and along with Zechariah he encouraged the people to rebuild the temple regardless of the many hindrances, which in the long run were mainly excuses (cf. 1:2, 9; 2:3, 4-9). Apart from his association with Zechariah, nothing is known about Haggai. His name means "my feast," and it may have been given to him in joyous anticipation of the return from captivity. From the words of Haggai 2:3, some have thought it possible that the prophet himself had seen the glory of Solomon's temple, in which case he would have been quite an old man at the time of his writing (at least 80 years old), while Zechariah was quite young (Zech. 2:4).

“The second year of Darius” (1:1), in which Haggai prophesied, was 520 B.C. Hystaspes (the Darius mentioned here) began his reign in 521 B.C. An interesting sidelight is the fact that Confucius, the celebrated Chinese philosopher, flourished in China at this time. While Zechariah prophesied over a period of three years, Haggai prophesied only three months and 24 days. There are five messages in the book, each delivered on separate and distinct occasions according to the calendar furnished in the prophecy itself (cf. 1:1, 2:1, 10, 20).

Haggai wrote much like a businessman, in a straight, open, sincere, frank manner. He was fond of asking questions as a means of provoking the people to serious thought (1:4; 2:3, 12, 13). His style is further characterized by his repetition of certain phrases, such as “saith the Lord” and “the word of the Lord” five times, Robert Lee having outlined Haggai’s prophecy around the five occurences of this last phrase (1:1-11, 12-15; 2:1-9, 10-19, 20-23).3

Outline

1. The Rebuke (1:1-11)
2. The Response (1:12-15)
3. The Reassurance (2:1-9)
4. The Restoration (2:10-19)
5. The Revelation (2:20-23)

Notable Notes

At this particular time (520 B.C.) of Israel’s long history there were many difficulties. The people had lost their

first love for rebuilding the temple and the altar, and they had bogged down midst the oppressing cares and anxieties of the time. They needed to be reawakened to the task, and God used such a man as Haggai to stir them into the realization and importance of the project facing them. He strongly rebuked the people, and then with sleeves rolled up he encouraged them by precept and practice to pursue the work before them, at the same time exhorting them to forsake the sin and slothfulness which had taken hold of their lives. In 24 days the people began to build.

The reconstruction and refurbishing of the temple was the supreme passion of Haggai, the same serving as the central theme of this brief prophecy. His authority was "the word of the Lord," and his message was simple and practical.

Zechariah, his contemporary, was the dreamer type of man with his "head in the clouds," while Haggai was the doer kind of individual with his "feet on the ground." The dreamer and the doer both need to walk together.

It is significant that within the scope of this brief prophecy Haggai mentions three temples: Solomon's (2:3a), Zerubbabel's (2:3b-5), and the Messiah's (2:6-9).

It must be kept in mind that Haggai's message goes far beyond his own day and, like the former prophets, points forward to the coming glory, his final message being apocalyptic in character. He wrote of that time when all the nations of the earth shall be shaken, and when still another house shall be filled with the glory of the Lord. In view of this, it is noteworthy that Haggai 2:6 is quoted in Hebrews 12:26.

Like Nehemiah, Haggai stands before God's people as a model workman, a pattern for believers to copy. He was a self-effacing servant, exalting his Lord. He chided, yet cheered; criticized, yet commended, having inspired the people to action by exhortation and example (see Ezra 5:1-2).

The practical message of this brief prophecy may be summed up by the well-known expression, "First things first" (cf. Matt. 6:33). Another summary message of the book is found in the words, "be strong and work" (2:4) and, in addition to Matthew 6:33, both 1 Corinthians 15:58 and James 1:22 could serve as New Testament commentaries on Haggai's basic message.

In the book of Haggai the LORD JESUS CHRIST is revealed as "THE DESIRE OF ALL NATIONS" (2:7).

FOOD FOR THE FLOCK is a publication dedicated to encouraging sound Bible study, to providing practical teaching on current issues and problems, and to challenging Christians to a greater devotion to our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

1 Robert Lee, The Outlined Bible.

2 The Shaw Pocket Bible Handbook, p. 320.

3 Lee, op. cit.

Zechariah

From the Editor's Notebook

Outline Studies of the Minor Prophets

Zechariah: The Book of Restoration and Glory

Key Word: Consummation. Message: "God's Love and Care for His People" (Robert Lee).1 "The Keeping Power of God" (Eric W. Hayden).2 Key Verses: 1:3 — "Therefore say thou unto them, Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Turn ye unto me, saith the Lord of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the Lord of Hosts." 1:14 — "So the angel that communed with me said unto me, Cry thou, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts; I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy." 2:8 —"For thus saith the Lord of hosts; After the glory hath He sent me unto the nations which spoiled you: for he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of His eye." 8:2 — "Thus saith the Lord of hosts; I was jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I was jealous for her with great fury."

Introduction

Zechariah was probably born in Babylon, outside the land of Palestine. The difficulty existing between Ezra 5:1, 6:14 and Zechariah 1:1 may be explained by the probability that his father died when he the prophet was only an infant, and that his grandfather Iddo (Neh. 12:4, 16) reared him. Zechariah's name means "Jehovah remembers," Berechiah "Jehovah blesses," and Iddo "the appointed time," these three names forming a key to the meaning of the book.

Zechariah was a priest as well as a prophet. Although somewhat younger, he was contemporary with and complementary to Haggai (Ezra 5:1). He was also a contemporary of Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the high priest (Ezra 5:2; Zech. 3:1; 4:6; 6:11). The background of Zechariah's prophecy is found in 1:6. After their return from exile, the Jewish remnant had worked hard to build their houses and rebuild the temple. However, poor crops, withering droughts, opposition from neighbors, declining trade, skyrocketing inflation, and political unrest brought the work almost to a standstill. The forthright prosaic preaching of Haggai had its effect, but a new voice was needed to encourage and strenghten the people in their despondency. This was Zechariah's mission and he fulfilled it by directing the people to behold with the eye of faith the glories of the nation in the future. He exercised his ministry for three years, having started to prophesy two months later than his contemporary Haggai. Zechariah began his prophetic labors in 520 B.C., both his and Haggai's prophecy having been dated from the second year of Darius I the Great's reign (522-486 B.C.). Dating a Hebrew prophecy by a Gentile king indicates that the times of the Gentiles (Luke 21:24) were in progress.

Zechariah's prophecy has the characteristics of an apocalypse, his visions resembling those of Daniel and of the Apostle John on the Isle of Patmos. It is interesting to observe that Daniel, Ezekiel and John all wrote outside of Palestine, while Zechariah wrote in the land.

Zechariah was a great poet, a fitting companion of the highly practical Haggai, and among the so-called Minor Prophets his book is unique, containing more Messianic prophecies than any of the others. In fact, it has been

called the most Messianic, the most truly apocalyptic and eschatological of all the writings of the Old Testament.

The Jewish Targum records that Zechariah was slain in the temple sanctuary, and that this Zechariah was both priest and prophet (Neh. 12:4). Josephus also states that Zechariah, the son of Baruchus, was slain in the temple. All of these things would identify Zechariah as the one mentioned by the Lord Jesus Christ as having been martyred (Matt. 23:35). Another Zecharias was ministering in the temple at the time of Christ's birth (Luke 1:57-80).

Outline

1. The Apocalyptic Visions (1-6)

2. The Historic Interlude (7-8)

3. The Prophetic Burdens (9-14)

Notable Notes

Included in the Messianic prophecies of Zechariah are: the Lord's Servant, the Branch (3:8); the Man, the Branch (6:12); the King-Priest (6:13); the True Shepherd (11:4-11); the True Shepherd versus the false shepherd — the Antichrist(11:15-17; 13:7); the betrayal of the Good Shepherd (11:12-13); His crucifixion (12:10); His sufferings (13:7); His second advent in glory (14:4).

The Branch is one of the great Old Testament titles of the Lord Jesus Christ. Actually, in the Old Testament there are 23 words translated "branch," but one, occurring 12 times, is used of Messiah on four great occasions: Jeremiah 23:5-6; 33:15; Zechariah 3:8; 6:12; and Isaiah 4:2. From the context of these references it is

observed that the Messiah is referred to as King, Servant, Man and Jehovah; and it is from these four viewpoints exactly that the four Gospels are written.

As for Zechariah's series of eight visions, the vision of the man among the myrtle trees is a picture of God's watchful care over Israel in this present age.

The vision of the four horns and the four carpenters, or carvers, raised up to destroy them stands for the nations that have oppressed the Jew and the instruments chosen by God to discipline these nations.

The vision of the surveyor forecasts a new Jerusalem that cannot be measured, and whose protecting wall is the presence of God.

The vision of Joshua clothed with filthy rags and then cleansed symbolizes the cleansing of Israel preparatory to the nation's future ministry in the day of Christ the Branch.

The vision of the candlestick represents Israel's spiritual revival, a nation supplied with the Spirit of Christ and enlightening the world.

The vision of the flying scroll represents the future reign of divine law throughout the earth.

The vision of the ephah (the largest of the dry measures used by the Jews), together with the women (often used as a symbol of religious error in the Scriptures), represent the final restraint to be put upon the evils of commercialism and ecclesiasticism.

The vision of the four chariots symbolizes the coming of divine judgment upon the nations, as well as the administration of Jehovah through the crowning of the true Joshua and Branch, Jesus Christ.

Chapters 7 and 8 disclose that the time will come when all fastings will give way to feasting.

The last six chapters, probably written some 30 years after the earlier portions of the book and accounting for Zechariah's change in style, deal with the coming, rejection, crucifixion, and ultimate delineation of Christ's Second Advent in great power and glory to set up His earthly kingdom.

Apart from Isaiah, no prophet presents so clear a picture of Christ in all of the Old Testament as does Zechariah, and no other is so frequently quoted in the New Testament.

The nations will one day "worship the King" (14:17), and "holiness unto the Lord" will yet pervade the earth (14:20).

The book is characterized by the three great ideas of: 1. a universal purpose; 2. a Messianic hope; 3. divine sovereignty.

In Zechariah the LORD JESUS CHRIST is revealed as THE SUFFERER AND THE SOVEREIGN (13:7; 9:9-11).

Editor's Note

In this issue, while continuing his series of devotional studies on the theme of "Encouragement," we present the first of a five-part series of articles by Dr. James T. Naismith which will provide our readers with sound, practical teaching on current problems and controversial matters facing all of us. Commencing with a basic study on "The Sanctity of Human Life," other articles will follow dealing with "Capital Punishment," "Suicide," "Euthanasia," and "Abortion."

Dr. Naismith of Scarborough, Ontario, is a retired physician who devotes his full time to teaching God's Word. He has recently returned from an extended ministry trip to Scotland and the Faero Islands. By the way, without looking in an atlas, do you know where these islands are located and to whom they belong?

We extend afresh our sincere gratitude to Dr. Naismith for his continued flow of edifying written ministry, as well as for his wise and helpful counsel over the years as a committee member of "Food for the Flock" magazine.

1 Robert Lee, The Outlined Bible.

2 Eric W. Hayden, Preaching through the Bible, p. 168.

Malachi

From the Editor’s Notebook

Outline Studies of the Minor Prophets

Malachi: The Book of Gathering Gloom

Key Word: Declension or Apostasy.

Message: “Remember, Repent, Return, Rehearse” (Robert Lee).1 Or, as Eric W. Hayden has summarized: “The Sin of External Observance Without Internal Experience.”2 Key Verses: 3:8 — “Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings.” 3:10 — “Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.”

Introduction

Malachi means “my messenger” and it seems best to take it as a personal name rather than an appellation based on 3:1. Malachi was later than Haggai and Zechariah, the temple having long been completed with the priesthood and worship having been in operation many years. He evidently ministered some time after Ezra’s and Nehemiah’s correction of current abuses, for once again decline had set in. As Nehemiah was the last of the Old Testament historians, Malachi was the last of the Old Testament prophets, having appeared around 433-425 B.C.

Malachi was evidently fond of his name and delighted to repeat it (cf. 2:7, 3:1). The meaning of his name was a description of his office. As to his personal biography, nothing is known, although judging something of the man by his book it would seem that Malachi possessed a strong and vigorous personality, being conscious of a divine call to the work of moral and spiritual reformation. The spiritual life of the people was at a low ebb, and many of the evils against which past prophets had protested were once more widespread. While idolatry had vanished, the people in their backslidden condition were hypercritical and guilty of hollow formalism and complaining skepticism. Robbery of God is a sad keynote of the book and reflects the gross materialism of the age. Malachi was thus sent by God to denounce those practices in connection with the spiritual, moral, social and material aspect of things which were dishonoring to Him and His worship. The differing attributes of God's love and wrath are quite apparent in the book. Furthermore, the prophecy is notable for its dialogue style, eight sarcastic questions being addressed to God. "Wherein" occurs seven times (1:2, 6, 7; 2:17; 3:7, 8, 13), while the expression "ye say" occurs twelve times (1:2, 6. 7, 12, 13; 2:14, 17; 3:7, 8, 13, 14). The prophecy can be divided or outlined by these expressions.

Outline

1. The Message of Confirmation (1:1-5)

2. The Message of Condemnation (1:6 -2:17)

3. The Message of Consolation (3-4).

Notable Notes

Being the last of the prophets, someone has said of Malachi that “his prophecies therefore have a grave and solemn importance, and on two accounts. First as showing the state of the remnant who, in the tender mercy of God, had been brought back from Babylon; and secondly, because of the correspondence of the position of this remnant with that of God’s people at the present moment. As there was nothing between them, so there is nothing to intervene between them, so there is nothing to intervene between ourselves and the expectation of the Lord’s return.”

W. Graham Scroggie has summed up the attitude of the people as follows: “Religiously, they were guilty of profanity and sacrilege; morally, of sorcery, adultery, perjury, fraud, and oppression; socially, they were untrue to their family responsibilities; and materially, they were ‘robbing God’ of the tithes due to Him.”3 As to the application of Malachi’s message, Scroggie has further stated, and this, in an apt way: “Malachi’s message is eminently necessary and appropriate today, for these abuses have their equivalent in the modern church. How prevalent is ‘a form of godliness,’ the power being denied; how weak are multitudes of Christians with regard to great moral questions; how frequent is alliance in marriage of saved and unsaved; and how shamefully lax are Christians in the matter of giving of their substance for the maintenance of God’s work. To this situation Malachi still speaks.”4 Malachi’s prophecy ends with a reference back to Moses, the great representative of the law, and forward to Elijah, the great representative of the prophets. He then foretold

the coming again of Elijah, a coming which at least had a partial fulfillment in the ministry of John the Baptist.

The very heart of hope in Malachi's prophecy is found in 3:10, 16-18.

It is noteworthy that the last word of Malachi, the last word of the Old Testament, and the last word before the long silence of 400 years fell, was the solemn, sobering word "curse." With that fearful word sounding in his ears, the Jew came to the end of his Bible. At the close of the first book of the Old Testament, Genesis, we read of a "coffin." Thus, summing up the entire scope of the Old Testament, all was failure. However, the New Testament opens and closes with the Second Man, the Lord from Glory has come, and grace is triumphant at last.

As John Phillips has thoughtfully stated: "The New Testament begins where the Old Testament ends. Without the New Testament, the Old Testament tells of a beginning without an ending, relates hundreds of promises and predictions without any lasting fulfillments, and begins with blessings and ends with a curse. Gratefully we now acknowledge that the silence of God has been broken. God has spoken to us in these last days in His Son."5 In Malachi the LORD JESUS CHRIST is revealed as the SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.

1 Robert Lee, The Outlined Bible.

2 Eric W. Hayden, Preaching Through the Bible, p. 172.

3 W. Graham Scroggie, Know Your Bible, I, pp. 217-18.

4 Ibid., p. 218.

5 John Phillips, Exploring the Scriptures, p. 183.