Obadiah (Samuel Ridout) 174262

From Genesis to Revelation: Lectures on the Structure and Contents of the Bible Books, Daniel to Malachi, Lecture 4: The Prophetical Books -

DANIEL, as his name suggests, is the Gentile prophet. In this book we are in the times of the Gentiles. It is, as you see, the fourth in the list, corresponding thus to the book of Numbers, the wilderness or world book. We have not to do primarily with Israel at all. The scene is laid in distant Babylon, which has usurped the place of Jerusalem and with Nebuchadnezzar as king, instead of one of the descendants of David. We have the concerns of the nations of the earth, but just so far as they refer to God's purposes.

There are many very instructive features in this book. Let us notice that just as the book of Numbers has in one of its earliest chapters that which characterizes, or should do so, the people as seen in that book—in the place and testimony of the Nazarite—so you have in the first chapter of Daniel the Nazarite place. When you come to the putting of the children of God in the world, and to the question as to how we are to walk in it, what is the first great principle that is to guide us? Numbers tells us.

In the sixth chapter of that book, a man to be a true pilgrim, a true and faithful witness for God in this world, must be a Nazarite; he must be separated from that by which he is surrounded. Abraham was the typical pilgrim, and he was the man who lived in a tent, isolated from others. In like manner. Lot is presented to us as the child of God typically linked with the world, defiled by it, his testimony destroyed and he himself saved only as by fire.

Nazariteship is the only power by which we can walk in this world for God, if we are to be a testimony for Him. If His name is to be honored by us, it must be absolutely by our separation from everything that would defile, degrade, and drag us down. How often has the lamp of testimony been quenched by the Lord's people being mingled with the world, by our living here as those who have interests and objects in common with the world.

I say again, in Numbers you have the key-note of the whole book in that chapter on the Nazarite-separation in the midst of defilement. And here in the book of Daniel, the book where the world is going to lift its head and show its power, where we are going to have spread before us the history of the Gentile nations, the very key to it all is, the Nazariteship of Daniel and his brethren in the court of the king of Babylon. Think of that young man taken from Jerusalem—Jerusalem itself all in ruins— transferred to the very courts of the king of Babylon, the first nation of the earth; Babylon itself the first city of the earth, with all that would attract, all that would appeal to the natural man, and he himself there introduced not into some humble inferior position, but to be one of the attendants about the king himself; to be in the very line of promotion, to make a success of his life. And what does he do? The first thing he does is to cut the line that would link him with the throne of Babylon; he separates himself absolutely from everything that partakes of the character of Babylon. "Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat;" and in that purpose of heart I trace the success—if I may use such a word—of his life down here for God. In that separation from the dainties of the king of Babylon, the pleasures and the allurements of that world-city—I trace the secret of those wondrous revelations that God gave to Daniel.

For an illustration of the same thing take John in the book of Revelation, where he has opened up to him a still wider vision, where his eye takes in not only the earth, but the heavens, not only time but eternity; takes in the whole range of God's dealing with men, and His purposes in connection with His blessed Son. What is the key thought of that book? "I was in the island that is called Patmos, for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus." Separate from all the glory and power of this world, John the lonely prisoner, in isolation, sees visions which no mortal eye can see; hears words that none but the anointed ear can hear, and opens to us the revelation of all the ways of God, introducing us into eternity itself.

Do you want to understand prophecy? Do you want to stand upon the pinnacle from whence you can look over all the kingdoms of this world, and the glory of them? Do you remember One who stood upon the mountain top and looked over all that glory, all that splendor of this world and its kingdoms, unmoved, unattracted by it? It was the blessed Son of God; and when Satan pointed out all to Him, and offered to put it into His hands, that blessed One, the true Nazarite, in heart separate from it all, would have none of it until His Father gave it to Him. So, I say, the Nazarite heart, the Nazarite position, the Nazarite separation in heart from the things of the world that would defile and clog, is the only proper spirit in which to come to and understand prophecy.

Prophecy is for the heart. I know nothing more deadening, nothing more injurious to our spiritual welfare than to be occupied with prophecy in a cold intellectual way. Look at the apostle Paul in the eleventh chapter of Romans. He has been unfolding God's dealings with Israel and with the Gentiles in the ninth, tenth, and eleventh chapters. He has been quoting Scripture prooftexts as to prophecy, foretelling the time when Israel as a nation will be restored to the Lord; but, it is his heart hat has been kindled by these things. His heart takes them up, and as he gets through with his subject, he bursts out in praise, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" If we are in true Nazarite spirit occupied with these prophetic subjects, Are will find that they introduce us into the sanctuary of sod Himself, to be occupied with Himself, praising and worshiping.

That, then, is the key—the point of vantage upon which Daniel stands here. He is a man with Babylon beneath his feet, and he stands as God's freeman there, stands as a witness for Him, with the recollection of Zion his heart. He can look unmoved upon Nebuchadnezzar's splendor, and Babylon's glory, and think yet of the time when the saints of the Most High shall possess the kingdom, and when Israel scattered, peeled, despised, and rejected, shall one day reign—reign in peace, and triumph over all the Gentile nations.

When you take up the book itself, we find in it subjects of the greatest interest and profit. I might say, that we have greater details in Daniel than in almost any other book. The various distinct and definite prophecies as to the future make it a book of peculiar interest. Here, for

instance, in the second chapter, you have Nebuchadnezzar's vision. Nebuchadnezzar has a vision and it slips from his mind. He has forgotten it all. Not only does he fail to understand its meaning, as Pharaoh failed to understand the meaning of the dream which he had about the famine in Egypt—the seven years of famine, and the seven years of plenty—but Nebuchadnezzar forgets what he has dreamed, and so when he appeals to the wise men of Babylon, they must tell him not only its meaning, but reproduce the vision itself.

That, of course, brings out the impotence of the wise men of Babylon, and to whom can he turn at a juncture like that except to those despised Hebrews, men who had refused the place, as you might say, of honor which he would have given them? Daniel comes to the front, and he tells him not merely the meaning, but actually recalls to his mind that which he saw in the night visions—that glorious image which was set before him with its head of gold, its chest of silver, its thighs of brass and its legs of iron and clay mingled together.

In the head of gold you have Nebuchadnezzar himself, entrusted with power and rule from God, and this gives us one of the prominent themes of the book—the account of the times of the Gentiles. The times of the Gentiles are those in which we are living at the present time. We are not living in the times of Israel, nor in connection with God's dealing directly with any nation upon the earth. He is dealing providentially now upon the earth, and everything in connection with it has to do with something besides an earthly nation.

When the two tribes composing the kingdom of Judah were led into captivity to Babylon, the times of the Gentiles began. You will therefore find that the description of the image which Nebuchadnezzar saw begins with a head of gold, and ends with feet of iron and clay. There is nothing about Israel in it, not a single word. You have in it first the kingdom of Babylon, or rather Nebuchadnezzar himself, then the Medo-Persian empire, then the Grecian, and finally the Roman empire, reaching down to that empire as it will be manifested in the last days, when you have the clay of democracy mingled with the iron strength of the imperial power of Rome.

You have not a word, I say, about Israel; it is a most important thing to remember that the position of Israel from the time of their first captivity is as aliens. They are not the people of God publicly acknowledged. Truly He restored them to the land after seventy years. He put them back there a people rescued, but you remember we saw in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, that they were not there as an independent people with a king over them, but as dependent upon the king of Persia. They were there as servants to the Gentile powers.

When the Son of God Himself was born, the King of Israel, under what circumstances was it? Who occupied the throne of Israel? an Edomite, king Herod. Who was over him? Why the very beast that is typified in the seventh chapter, the head of the Roman Empire. The times of the Gentiles had come in, and the Son of God, the King of Israel, has His place in a manger, not even in the inn, the place of strangers here, but actually among the beasts. A wild beast upon the throne of the land, and His place whose true right it was to reign, amongst the beasts in the stall at Bethlehem. That shows us as nothing else could that it was the time of the Gentiles. When the true King of Israel comes He has no place in the land. We need not here trace His history, for He never got a foothold upon the throne of Israel as He never got a place in their hearts. I may say, that when the time comes that Israel will repent and turn to the Lord, He will have a place in their hearts, and when He gets that, He will have a place upon the throne of Israel. He will be their King indeed, but until they receive Him, He will not be King. The times of the Gentiles go on.

Trace the subject a little further. After the Lord's crucifixion, and He has been preached by Peter at Pentecost, you have Him still presented to the Jews for their acceptance. Had they received Him, He would have come again as Peter prophesied, and they would have had their King upon His throne. They still rejected Him, and confirmed their words to Pilate—that they had no king but Caesar. Had they had prophetic knowledge, it would have meant they had no king but that Beast; they had no one reigning over them, but that image which Nebuchadnezzar saw in his vision with the legs of iron and clay.

So these times have gone on, they are here now, they will go on till Christ sets up His Kingdom and will reign here over the earth. That is what we see in Nebuchadnezzar's vision. The stone cut out of the mountain without hands strikes the image. Christ's Kingdom out of the mountain of God's purposes comes and smites, not upon the head of the image nor upon any other part of its body, but on the feet that were part of iron and part of miry clay. That is, Christ when He comes as King will smite with judgment that ten-fold form of the kingdom which you have in the ten toes, part of iron—imperial strength— mingled with the miry clay of democracy. It is, in other words, when the imperial power of western Europe will be reunited in a sort of democratic form, part of iron, part of clay, and that ten-fold kingdom set up with one to rule over it called the Beast, as in the book of Revelation. Then it is that Christ will come in judgment and smite that form of the kingdom; then the whole image of man's rule, which speaks of man's thoughts and hopes with regard to the world, will crumble into dust. Man's kingdom will crumble into dust and be swept forever out of sight, and the Kingdom of our blessed God with Christ as its head, that little stone cut out without hands out of a mountain, will increase and become a mighty mountain itself bringing peace and blessing and righteousness to the earth.

That is the vision which Nebuchadnezzar saw, and that the interpretation which Daniel gives him. If we had time we might see how very similar Daniel's own vision is to it, in the seventh chapter of the same book. There you have a four-fold monarchy again; it is not presented in a human form, however, but as wild and cruel beasts. The four beasts correspond again to the four kingdoms that I have before spoken of. The final kingdom with its ten horns is the same that you have in the ten toes of the image, with the added thought of the little horn, the beast itself of whom I was speaking, the imperial head of the restored Roman empire. Instead of the stone cut out of the mountain, you have the Son of man Himself coming and taking the kingdom; but the general meaning of the visions is identical. It is striking, however, that you have in the seventh chapter, not the image of man, (such as the world sees) but what God sees. All the authority and power of this world is but of the beast. "Man being in honor and understanding not is like the beasts that perish." He is not even a man. That explains the two great pivotal chapters of the book, the image in the second chapter, and the beast in the seventh. An attentive study of these two chapters will give you the history of the times of the Gentiles.

We have very much else in the book that is of intense interest. For instance, in the next chapter, the third, we have the account of the golden image which Nebuchadnezzar set up. It seems as if the man had forgotten almost immediately the lesson that God had taught him. He saw that image crumbling into dust and passing away, but what does he do? Does he bow to God? Does he own His authority? He sets up this image to be worshiped, an image suggested doubtless by what he had seen in his vision. Everyone had to bow to that image, and if not, he was to be cast into the fiery furnace. How we are carried on to the last days here, the time at which is set up "the image of the beast," as it is called in Revelation; linking thus together these two chapters in Daniel.

When that image is set up everyone who will not bow and worship it, is to be cast into what answers to the furnace of fire. He suffers the greatest tribulation. We see the remnant here in the third chapter, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. Men who had taken, as I was saying, the Nazarite place, when it comes to bowing to the image, to owning any authority which dethrones God Himself, those separate men are the ones that can refuse. Let us turn to a practical thought for a moment. When Christ so fills our hearts, that we refuse the things of earth, they will have no charm that we bow to them. Satan will not make us bow to him nor to his things, when we take the true Nazarite place. Has not your soul thrilled many times when you have read that third chapter of Daniel? Think of that immense assemblage gathered together in the plain of Dura—all the great men, the mighty men, the kings and notables of the empire of Babylon there assembled; and hearken to the sweet music of all the various instruments—the psaltery, the sackbut, and the harp, everything that would stir the people and make them fall in with what is going on there. Three lonely men stand there, three men face the mightiest king of the whole earth, standing there alone in the face of universal adoration of that image, with their heads covered, and upright as God's witnesses; and all the mighty power of Nebuchadnezzar cannot get them to bow. All the example of those gathered hosts cannot get them to yield. All the sweet music from that wondrous orchestra cannot influence them to bow the knee to that image. Nay that fiery furnace glowing seven times hotter than ever, threatening them, cannot turn them from their faithfulness to God.

Where are there such men today? We are not living in the times of the fiery furnace, but I can hear the music, I can hear the sackbut, the psaltery and the harp, and all these alluring things that would attract the people of God. Where are there those who are not, in some way or other, bowing to the image and following the multitude? What an honor to be standing for God at a time of universal apostasy. If you read your Bibles, you will find that it is in such a time that the light of testimony shines out brightest. Take the history of individuals. You will find in the darkest days of the history of the kings of Israel, that Josiah and men like him lived. If we are but few, as those men of Israel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, and all the world is following after the image of a false god, if we are faithful to Him we can have a testimony like them. They are cast into the furnace, but they knew God; and they said to Nebuchadnezzar, "Our God can deliver us out of your hand." What a word to say to the mighty ruler who thought he had all things in his hands, "our God is able to deliver us, and if not" —not if He is not able to deliver us, but if He does not choose to deliver us— "be it known unto thee, O king, we will not worship the image that thou hast set up." Let us go into the furnace; heat it seven times hotter, you will but burn up your own minions, and the human bonds that would tie us; but you cannot hurt us. Into that furnace they go, only to find a companion there who is none other than the Son of God.

That is all the fire of persecution can do, all that this world's threats can do, —put us into a place where only our bands are burnt. Have you not found it so? In your times of prosperity you have found that the world was wrapping its silken cords about you, and holding you fast. Affliction has come, perhaps persecution, and how those silken cords which held you, and which were so strong, are burned away, and you walk in the very fire which you feared would consume you. You need never fear anything that is brought upon you through faithfulness and devotion to the Lord.

But we must hasten on for we have other subjects, and yet I am sure we love to linger on these practical lessons to get what the Lord would have for our souls. In the third chapter, we see Nebuchadnezzar with his gorgeous image set up, and that image despised by a handful of faithful men. In the next chapter, you have him learning the lesson which he refused to learn before. We find him, the mighty man, the mightiest monarch of all the earth, humbled—because of his pride. There is only one verse in that chapter that I will quote, "Them that walk in pride, He knoweth how to abase." Words that came from Nebuchadnezzar's lips when he had learned the lesson. There is the mighty king, the head of gold—there amongst the beasts—linking again in a striking way, the second and the seventh chapters, for those who have an eye to see it. He is put amongst the beasts and eating grass like an ox—that mighty monarch. It is as though God would teach him the lesson I quoted a little while ago, "Man being in honor and understanding not, is like the beasts that perish." And he learns that God will abase those who walk in pride. Good will it be for this world and its mighty men, when they learn that pride is their worst enemy; and, to come again to a practical thought, good it is for us when we learn, no matter how painful the humbling, no matter how distasteful to us, to have no confidence in the flesh. Then we can, like Nebuchadnezzar in this fourth chapter, exalt the God of all grace, for we have taken our true place.

In the next chapter, you have the awful wickedness going on amongst the Gentiles pictured in Belshazzar and his feast. He says, "Bring all the golden vessels, and everything that has been taken from Jerusalem." He has an impious, unholy feast with them. He blasphemes the Lord as he praises his idols of silver and gold. That is the end of the kingdom of Babylon, and of Gentile oppression. It is a typically prophetic chapter, which points on to the end when God is blasphemed, as He will be in those last days, when no one shall be allowed to buy or sell who has not received the mark of the beast in his forehead or in his hand. Then comes out the writing on the wall, "Thou art weighed in the balances and art found wanting." "Mene, Mene, Tekel Upharsin." Gentile history is a history of apostasy.

How foolish is the thought of man that the world is improving in the light of these solemn truths. Nebuchadnezzar was the best king the Gentiles ever had; he was more faithful to God than any other, and yet how low he had to come. Belshazzar is the fitting representative of the culmination of Gentile power, in the open apostasy and blasphemy of the last days. The writing is upon the wall; those who have eyes to see it as had Daniel, can see that writing on the wall of this world's banquet hall. You hear of a Parliament of nations, of the confederation of the world and of the progress of everything here. Ah, in the midst of the revelry of man's celebration of his progress and his development, see the finger of God writing there, "all is weighed in the balances and found wanting."

The sixth chapter gives us a final development of that, which is, That if any pray to any, God or man, except to the king Darius, he will be cast into the den of lions. That gives us another typical view. It is the final culmination. We have seen the apostasy in Belshazzar's feast, but here we have the exaltation of the king as God Himself. Darius seems to be a man, personally, that we can have a good deal of interest in, a man who recoiled from what he had done, but in type he represents the Beast—the absolute apostasy of man. Daniel represents the remnant, the faithful few who in those last days will refuse to give up the worship of God. As a result they are cast into the den of the lions, they go through the great tribulation of the last days, when Satan the "roaring lion" would devour them, but has his mouth shut; and they come out of it tried, faithful, and true for God, His witnesses, and the nucleus of a kingdom for Christ upon the earth.

That gives us the close of the whole history. The rest of the book of Daniel goes over it in another way. I have already alluded to the seventh chapter. In the eighth, you have the history of the eastern kingdom instead of the western, as in the seventh; and in the ninth, you have that remarkable prophecy of the seventy weeks which, as those who are familiar with prophecy know, is so important for the correct understanding of the times of God's dealings with the world. For its interpretation, I must refer you to other books, and pass on even more

rapidly.1

The last three chapters give us the progress of events, more particularly in the east where, with much detail that has had fulfillment in good measure, we have unmistakably the features of the Antichrist, the willful king, who is associated in Revelation 13 with the beast.

Very beautiful it is to see Daniel alone in the first chapter, and Daniel alone in the last chapter of his book. All the glory of this world passes before us, but the man that stands for God alone at the beginning is the man who will be alone at the end. “But go thou thy way till the end be; for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days.” Though the world is triumphing now, in this the brief day of man, those men, separate to God now, will stand alone in that day of blessing: “He that doeth the will of God shall abide forever.”

That gives us, most imperfectly, some thought of what you have in this most interesting prophecy of Daniel. I would commend it to you for your careful study. It defines in the most beautiful way what is personal, and what is dispensational. It gives you food for your soul as well as for your intellect, and you find, as I said before, that the study of prophecy in that way makes you a worshiper, instead of a cold collector of statistics and proof texts.

That closes for us the fourth part of this main division, the times of the Gentiles, leaving us the twelve so-called minor prophets to complete the prophetic Pentateuch. These give us the fifth section, the Deuteronomy of the prophets. That this is not arbitrary but simply following the ordinary view is well known to most Bible students. Various reasons justify this: they are all short books; similar subjects permit them to be closely grouped together. Notice particularly that in the twelve prophets we have the governmental number; and that is what you get in the fifth sections of the books.

It is God’s way, God’s principles in government, and that is what you find throughout the twelve books—the number of government itself.

We haven’t time to look at the reasons for it, but I owe to another2 the grouping of these books which is certainly suggested the moment you see them. I may say that the order of these books in our English Bible, is not what you find in the original, and has no sanction. But there is an order of subjects that is very striking. For instance, take Hosea: This prophet deals largely with Israel, rather than Judah as most of the prophets do; for instance, Isaiah and Jeremiah. But Hosea seems to be dealing as much with Israel as with Judah. The same is true of Amos and also of Micah. They all have both kingdoms before them, and their subject is the same. Hosea is very beautiful. I can remember, years ago, how he was the first prophet, I think even before Isaiah, that won my affections.

There is a pleading of the heart of God in Hosea, God coming down to man’s level and as a man pleading, fare to face with a people whom He loves. Ephraim apostate, feeding upon the east wind—Ephraim whose folly we have designated as that of a silly dove—and yet, a people beloved, whom He could not give up. His relenting’s are kindled together. He yearns over that people, and Judah, making Him plead and entreat for them to return. It is a wonderful appeal. He does not take the place of distance, standing on high and pronouncing judgment upon them, but in the person of the prophet He comes down to their true condition, He comes down to their unfaithfulness to Him, and begs them to return.

Notice in the last chapter the effect of such entreaty: “O Israel return unto the Lord thy God, for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. Take with you words and turn to the Lord.” And notice, when God is pleading for His people He leaves nothing undone to induce them to return. He will put the words in their mouth; He will tell them what to say. We know not what to tell our God? then He puts the words in our lips. He says: “Say unto Him, take away all iniquity and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips. Ashur shall not save us,” (i.e. the powers of the world) “we will not ride upon horses,” (the power of Egypt as you have it in the thirtieth of Isaiah), “neither will we say any more to the work of our hands” (idolatry) “ye are our gods; for in Thee the fatherless findeth mercy.”

What words to put into the lips of a sinful people who have departed from Him! What is His answer to that? “I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely, for mine anger is turned away from them. I will be as the dew unto Israel; he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon.”

God takes up the little lily with its beauty, that small flower, and yet more beautiful than Solomon in his glory; He takes up the cedar of Lebanon in all its greatness, its strength, and He says that His poor, brokenhearted, penitent people, that backsliding people, when they are returned to Him, that they shall be healed, they shall be as beautiful as the lily, and as great and mighty as Lebanon itself; their splendor shall fill the earth. That is the end of the dealings of God with them, and that is what you get in this prophet.

Amos takes a different ground. He does not come down and plead with the people, but he solemnly declares the judgment of God. Does not that strike you? How beautiful are His ways. In one place you see Him as it were entreating them and putting words in their lips, to repent and return to Him. In another He stands off and solemnly denounces their sin, and declares judgment that will fall upon them for it.

All through Amos you find that solemn declaration of judgment upon both Judah and Israel, and more than that upon Edom, and Moab, and Ammon, and all the nations that are connected with Israel, and who occupy their territory in the last days. We have not time to dwell upon this, but you find that he is very similar to Hosea, except as I say, the element of infinite tenderness is not there, but rather the declaration of their sin and departure from God.

Passing to Micah, which completes the first group of three, you have there God’s holiness and the person of Christ. Look, for instance, in the fifth chapter, “Thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be least among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto Me that is to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.” In connection with Christ you have the repentance of the people, and their blessing in the last days.

Let us briefly go over those three parts. In Hosea he is speaking of divine mercy coupled with divine righteousness; in Amos the declaration of God’s judgment upon sin and the consequences of that, and when that sin is judged, God setting up the tabernacle of David again in the last days. But in Micah, after the sin of the people, the result of their alienation from God, is put before them, that Christ Himself whom they had rejected, might appear as the One through whom their blessing is to come. Even His work is presented to us there, for we are told that the

judge of Israel shall be smitten upon the cheekbone; and yet that Judge is He who shall rule over them, whose birth at Bethlehem is predicted, and to which even the scribes and Pharisees and Herod could turn as the prophet had pointed, as where Christ should be born.

Then we come to the second group, beginning with Joel. He sets before us the judgment on the nations. You have here in Joel, and in fact, in all three of these next prophets, the nations coming in. You have Joel, Obadiah, and Jonah. Joel gives us the general judgment on Israel and on the nations as a whole, and then you have in the last days the fulfillment of that prophecy as you know, when God will pour His Spirit upon all flesh. Obadiah gives us more particularly the judgment upon Edom; and then Jonah the last of the three gives us the threatened judgment upon Nineveh, and God's mercy too. We will dwell a little upon Jonah for there are some very interesting things there, though familiar to many. Jonah is not merely the personal history of the prophet, but it gives the typical history of Israel as well. Israel was to be the witness of God's righteousness among the nations; God had sent them to be a testimony to all the world, you might say. What have they done? They refused to go and bear witness for God. They go rather to Tarshish. They take their place upon the sea, that is amongst the Gentiles and they are cast into the sea like Jonah, and lost amongst the nations. That is the condition of Israel today; buried amongst the nations, buried in the depths of the sea; but Jonah is a resurrection book, and you have there in type Israel cast out from amongst the nations, and going to preach then, in the last days as she would not do at first, going to declare God's message to the Gentiles typified by Nineveh the head of them all.

When God's message is declared, you have repentance on the part of Nineveh, and you have too, God's lesson as to His patience and forbearance with all mankind brought out in the last chapter. We have only time to allude to it in that way, but the second group, these three that I have spoken of, Joel, Obadiah, and Jonah, give us God's judgment upon the Gentiles, but His blessing upon them too in connection with restored Israel, raised again.

That leads us to the third group. The prophet Nahum dwells largely upon the chief of the Gentile nations, the Assyrian, and upon the pride of man as exhibited in that nation. There are many beautiful things there which we cannot speak of even, but connected with it you have next, in Habakkuk, the prophet that brings out that wonderful scripture Paul dwells on so much— "the just shall live by faith" (ch. 2:4). In the third chapter and the seventeenth verse, "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stall: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." It is the salvation of God by faith that satisfies the soul of the prophet in the midst of the abounding desolation that is all around. He cries out, "O Lord revive Thy work," but in the midst of it all, his confidence is in the Lord.

Zephaniah, the next prophet, fitly in the third place, gives us these principles of God's holiness in judgment also, and the effect. I can only quote a characteristic of it in the third chapter, and thirteenth verse: "The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies, neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth, for they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid. Sing O daughter of Zion, shout O Israel, be glad and rejoice with all thy heart O daughter of Jerusalem." And again in the seventeenth verse, "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." How beautiful to see God's joy in His love to His people; and what has He done to rejoice in them? He has forgiven them: He has turned away their iniquity from them, He has brought out that poor and afflicted people that He speaks of in the twelfth verse; He has made them a pure and holy people, and now they can sing and rejoice. God can rejoice over them because His judgments have had their effect upon them. That is always God's way, Nahum, the pride of man abased. Habakkuk, "The just shall live by faith." Zephaniah God rejoices over His people because they have learned the lesson of holiness.

That leads us to the last group of these twelve, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. They are, you know, entirely connected with the times of the restoration from Babylon, and what came after. All these other prophets were before the captivity; these last are the captivity prophets. Haggai speaks of the rebuilding of the temple, Zechariah of the re-establishment of Mount Zion, and the city of Jerusalem as the center of blessing; while Malachi refers further on to the universal departure, even when they have been restored from Babylon, and of the time of blessing still future. Let us dwell a moment upon these three.

We read in the book of Ezra that the building of the temple prospered through the prophesying of Haggai and Zechariah. But I want you to notice how it prospered: not by what we call encouragement, not by what we would call a helpful word. I think if Haggai had been amongst us, we would have said his words were too sharp; they will offend the saints, and hinder the Lord's work. He tells them plainly what they were doing. He says, Look at the Lord's house lying waste; look at your houses with all your comforts. You are seeking your own things and neglecting the things of God. And do you expect blessing? Are you surprised that you carry out much and bring in little? you gather and you save and you put it into a bag to find it leak out through holes. Take up the building of God's house, and you will find blessing for yourselves. It was a pungent word for their conscience, but a word that had its effect, as all God's word will when we take it home to our hearts.

Are we today neglecting God's things? Are we thinking more of our own interests than His? We need not be surprised if our souls are lean, if the world comes in and has power over us, and even the flesh itself lead us away. If we make God's things first, if we make His glory first, everything will fall into its true place. We will find how true that is which the Lord says, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness." Let His things be supreme. Let Christ's glory be the first object of our lives, we can rest assured that the least things of our need will be cared for by Him. Heaven and earth are held together in blessing by the fact that God is exalted. Let Him be exalted and His creatures must be blest. Let Him be exalted by us, we will find as Haggai told them, all their blessing will flow from this. He points on to the time when the glory of that latter house shall be greater than that of the temple that Solomon built; and that time is not yet fulfilled, but will be when in Mount Zion the temple of the Lord shall be filled with the glory of the Lord, and all nations shall flow unto it.

Zechariah gives us very strikingly throughout the whole of his prophecy, the fact that God is caring for the welfare of that beloved city. You see there the horses as emblems of God's providential government among the nations. These and all the other visions in the first part of his book tell us of God's purposes all centering about Jerusalem. Then in the last part, you find him using plainer language than that of vision, language which points forward to the time when Jerusalem, though compassed with armies, and assaulted by the Gentile, shall be delivered; and when too, far more important than her deliverance, Jerusalem shall return from her sin.

He tells us the time is coming when the house of Israel shall mourn, everyone apart, every family apart, mourning for their sin. He tells us of the time too when they shall look upon the One whom they have pierced—direct prophecy as to the rejected Christ. "They shall look upon Him whom they have pierced and mourn because of Him." Two kinds of mourning are here, for their sin and apostasy, and for their piercing

of that blessed One through whom all their future blessings are to come.

He foretells in the most distinct way of Christ rejected, His betrayal by Judas, of the scattering of the people when the Shepherd is smitten; nay, he even tells of Antichrist, that idol-shepherd, that false shepherd, who shall attempt to reign over God's people. But it is all working together for the blessing of the people. Antichrist is judged, the people penitent, the Gentiles, the Assyrian, all of them scattered abroad, and Israel set up in blessing in their land, Jerusalem the joy of the whole earth; and then the Gentile nations coming from everywhere to keep the feast of Tabernacles. It is a wonderful prophecy.

We do not know what we are losing by neglecting diligent, close study of the prophets. We know Romans, Galatians perhaps, but oh to come down to a careful, thorough study and familiarity with these Old Testament prophets. You get lessons for your soul, and a vision of God's purposes with regard to the earth that will make you walk like kings now, as we will be kings then. Kings not upon the throne, but kings with God's will enthroned in our hearts, and like the exiled king David, a king in Adullam; so we, as associated with His thoughts, may be kings even here in heart, as we look over the world.

That leaves us but Malachi, who is intensely sad because he reminds us of the fact that no matter what God might do for His people, no matter how He might recover them again from Babylon, they are the same people yet. They need to be born again. They have no heart for God or the things of God, and so you find in Malachi a most wretched state. I might say, that these four chapters of Malachi resemble portions of the gospel of Matthew. Scribes and Pharisees are in the ascendency, religion but no reality. They can bring offerings to God of the lame or blind, whatever they please. Malachi pierces all with the sharp point of the sword when he says, "you bring that offering to your governor, and see if he will take it." Then he goes on to tell the people that they are robbing God, robbing Him by professing a devotion which they did not possess. It is a sad picture, but towards the last of it the light begins to shine. First of all you have the remnant testimony, "They that feared the Lord spake often one to another; and the Lord hearkened and heard," and He says, "They shall be mine in that day when I make up my jewels." Then he goes on and foretells that the prophet Elijah shall come as the forerunner of the Lord. We know that might have been fulfilled in John the Baptist, at Christ's first coming, had the people been ready; but they were not, and the Lord needed to die. Therefore John's ministry is only preparatory. The time is yet coming when there shall be a testimony as from Elijah to the people, a witness as to their having departed from God.

Then at the last the prophet says, "But unto you that fear my name, shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in His wings, and ye shall go forth and grow up as calves of the stall." Malachi with all the departure of a partially restored people about him, with all the discouragement that comes from the failure of a testimony revived for the time being—his only comfort, his only hope is the same comfort and hope that you and I can have. God may raise up a testimony again and again, but ah, there is only one thing that can give you comfort here. It is not in any testimony that they may give here„ but it is in the coming of that Sun of righteousness with healing in his wings. And Malachi as he saw the restored people gathered about him there—going on with their self-righteous Pharisaism, going on to the rejection of Christ—his eye can only look forward to the time of which David spoke in his last days, in the twenty-third of second Samuel, when he speaks of the same King as the one that ruleth over men, just, ruling in the fear of God. He says, "He shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun rises, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain." Ah! over Israel, over the world, gross darkness prevails, but faith is linked with light from another source; faith sees the purposes of God, sees the time when Christ shall gain control here, in the world where He is rejected.

The only hope that the prophet could have—that you or I can have, is the coming of the Son of God, and a fitting conclusion that is, to these books of the prophets. Whatever their scope, whatever their thought, wherever they point the finger—and they range over the whole world, take in all nations, and all divine principles—it is all centered in that one hope for which we all wait, "The Sun of righteousness will arise with healing in His wings." When that sun rises upon this poor sin-cursed earth, darkness will flee away, and it will be like the morning, a cloudless morning after the rain, and the mown grass that is dry and parched, will spring up and blossom; or as Malachi so beautifully says, they will be led forth as calves of the stall. How near it is! You remember, of course, that our hope is "the bright and morning Star," something even before the break of day, before the coming of the Son of Man as the Sun of righteousness, riding upon the white horse. But these are but the two aspects of His coming—we wait for His coming, that is all. We learn His will, we seek to obey Him, to bear witness for Him, but ah, there is nothing that forms the foundation for our hope but His coming again. We wait for that, nothing can take its place.

When He first came down, it was as it were on the wings of a dove bringing mercy and salvation by His death. When He comes down again it will be on the wings again, bringing healing and blessing even through judgment. Are we looking for that day? Are we waiting for the coming of the Lord? And are our hearts indeed so linked with His, that there is nothing that will give us greater joy than to see Him—to behold Him, and beholding Him to know that at last all His will be like Him, for all shall see Him. May we long for that coming and wait and watch for Him.

And so must close our fragmentary examination or these wondrous books. How meager all is. May it lead us to turn afresh to these the most neglected portions of God's word.

clickbible.org