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Girdle of Truth: Volume 7, Minor Prophets, The

The question may sometimes have occurred, when reading the Minor Prophets, why are they arranged in the order we have them? Is it accidental, or is it designed? They are not chronologically arranged, excepting the last three, who prophesied after the return of the Jews from Babylon. Were they placed in chronological order, we should have them as follows—Jonah, Joel, Amos, Micah, Hosea, Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Obadiah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi. Why, then, are they arranged differently? Can the subjects of the different prophecies furnish a clue to their position in the sacred volume?

Hosea is the first of the twelve as we have them, according to the arrangement in the Hebrew Bible. Why should his prophecy stand first? In the following pages an answer is attempted to be given.

In this book we have the grounds of God's moral dealings with Israel. They were His people. He would cast them off because of their sins. " Ammi" should be " Lo Ammi," and " Ruhareah" become " Lo Ruhaniah." But was that a final sentence? No. " I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people, and they shall say, Thou art my God." (Hos. 2:23.) Such is the statement of the Spirit of God. It is further added, " The children. of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim. Afterward shall the children of Israel return and seek the Lord their God, and David their king, and shall fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days." (Chapter 3:4,5.) How can this be brought about? How will it be accomplished? These two questions are answered in these prophets. Hosea answers the first; the others, Malachi excepted, answer the second.

Having, in the three first chapters of the prophecy, stated what Israel had been, what it was to be and what would again be, in the last days, the Spirit of God in chap. 4-10 gives s picture of the moral condition of the nation when the prophet wrote, showing the utter corruption of all classes—people, prophets, priests, princes. How, then, could God deal with them again?

He could not on the ground of what they were; but He could deal with them in grace. Hence, from 11-14 we have that brought out, ending with the confession, which the Lord prepares for them, when they shall see their sin and turn to Him. Hosea is therefore the account of God's moral dealings with them, showing why they are cast off, and on what principle He can yet bring them in. It stands, then, as the first prophet of the twelve, ere the judgments and circumstances connected with their restoration are recounted.

Joel comes next. His subject is the day of the Lord, in special connection with what will take place in Judah and at Zion. We have the fasting and mourning of Judah, when judgment comes on them, the Lord's interference with the northern army, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and the gathering of all nations to the valley of Jehoshaphat for judgment. Zion, we see, is to be the center of the whole earth: " The Lord shall roar out of Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem." (3:16.) Joel then gives us the sphere in which the great and solemn events of that day will be principally transacted.

Amos succeeds Joel, opening with judgments on all the nations who inhabit any portion of the territory which God promised to Israel-between the Euphrates and river of Egypt. He then goes on to speak of judgments on Israel and Judah, all of which have already taken place. From 3-8 we get another account of the moral Condition of Israel, which brought on them God's judgments. In ix. we read the final condemnation of the sinful kingdom, (8,) but the restoration of the tabernacle of David, as in the days of old—not the appearance of a new dynasty under the name of David, but the re-establishment of his house. In close connection with this we have the statements (1) that they shall possess the remnant of Edom, and (2) that there will then be Gentiles on whom the Lord's name is called. The two following prophets open out these two thoughts; Obadiah giving the destruction of Edom, and the possession of Mount Seir by Israel; and Jonah showing on what principle God can deal with Gentiles as exhibited in his dealings with Nineveh by the hand of his servant. It is not that they are innocent, for all have sinned. It is not that He fulfills His covenant with them, for He never made one with Gentiles. It is not on the ground of law that He deals with them. It can only then be on the ground of grace, sending a message to them, telling them what they are, and the consequences of their sin if persisted in, a message which when received is one of salvation to those who believe it.

Micah follows. Here we get the circumstance of the last days in connection with Israel again introduced and fresh subjects stated. If kingly power is to be restored as predicted by Amos to the house of David, the true worship of God is also to be re-established in Jerusalem. " In the last days it shall come to pass that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills and people shall flow unto it. And many nations shall come and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths; for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." (iv. 1, 2.) Thus the true worship of God will be restored in Jerusalem, and that not for Israel only but for many nations as well. But Micah gives us other prophecies of interest. He tells us who the King is, what treatment He will meet with, and we know how that has come to pass-His birthplace as man, His eternal existence as God, " whose goings forth have been of old from everlasting." (v. 1, 2.)

The result of the King's authority being asserted is the destruction of the great center of worldly or political power, the Assyrian of the latter day. (v. 5, 6.) But ere that takes place the remnant will pass through much trouble from the ungodly part of the nation. (vii. 2.) What the Lord foretold (Matt. 24) will then come to pass. (5, 6.) What the remnant have to do is therefore stated. " I will look onto the Lord, I will wait for the God of my salvation." (7.) The ungodly may rejoice at their trials. They acknowledge they are of the Lord, but they look for deliverance; for " 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. He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us, he will subdue our iniquities, and thou

wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old." (18-20.)

These two latter subjects, the destruction of the Assyrian and the position of the remnant, form the burden of the two next prophets, Nahum and Habakkuk, in the latter of whom we see the ungodly in the midst of evil, waiting for the fulfillment of the vision, for it will come, and rejoicing in God, even if all outward prosperity has vanished.

Zephaniah follows. His subject is the day of the Lord. (1. 14-18.) We have then the judgment of the Philistines, Moab and Ammon, and the occupation of their territories by the children of Israel. Ethiopia also and the land of Nimrod are included in the nations judged. But not merely have we judgment spoken of, but the nations of the world forsaking idols and worshipping the Lord. " He will famish all the gods of the earth, and men shall worship him every one from his place, even all the isles of the heathen." (ii. 11.) Micah predicted many nations coming to Jerusalem, to learn the ways and laws of the God of Israel. Here we have a wider scene, the acknowledgment of the Lord by all nations as the only true God, and their legitimate object of worship. " I will turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent." (3:9.)

We come next to the three prophets who prophesied to the returned remnant after their restoration, placed in chronological order. Yet there seems in them also a moral order which befits their position. Micah and Zephaniah have predicted the restoration of worship at Jerusalem, and all nations serving the Lord with one consent. Haggai follows with a prediction respecting the glory of the house in the last days, which shall exceed all former glory. " For thus saith the Lord of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come; and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts. The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts; and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts." (2:6-9.)

After this we have Zechariah, in whose writings the two lines of prophecy respecting the king, and the restoration of worship converge. We have had the predictions about the restoration of kingly power, and the person in whom they will be accomplished, and the reestablishment of worship at Jerusalem. But a temple implies a priest. Zechariah tells us that the priest and king are one and the same. " He shall be a priest on his throne." (6:13.) Nor this only, but the object of worship, which we have had before stated as the Lord of hosts, is now found to be Him who is King. " And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all nations which come against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year, to worship the King, the Lord of hosts." (14:16.) Nor this only; but now that the millennium, so long promised, has commenced, and all authority opposed to the King, the Son of man, the Lord of the earth, outwardly, at least, has ceased; and the harvest and vintage of the earth having taken place, the time is come for the feast of tabernacles, and these nations shall keep it at Jerusalem. If any refuse they shall be punished. Here the prophecy stops. Beyond this point, the establishment of the millennium, the Spirit of God in the Old Testament does not go, except, perhaps, in Isa. 65;66, where the new heavens and the new earth are spoken of as to be created. If we seek for further information about the events on the earth, we must go to 2 Peter and Revelation. Here, therefore, the Old Testament revelation stops. It has carried us to the commencement of the millennium, but no further.

Malachi now comes, and closes the book of the minor prophets. His prophecy seems characterized more by a warning to the remnant to consider their ways, and remember the Lord is coming suddenly to His temple, (3:1,) and there will be a day of judgment and discrimination between the righteous and the wicked, (iii. 18, and iv. 1,1 for which they should be prepared; but before it comes, the prophet Elijah should be sent. He does not go beyond Zechariah in his prophecy, but rather appeals to the people to be ready when all these things should come to pass, thus forming a fitting conclusion to these prophets, as Hosea is a commencement.

Shortly to sum up the outline given above: Hosea gives the ground of God's dealings with Israel when they had forfeited everything. Joel, Amos, Micah, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, unfold each some new subject with reference to the day of the Lord and the establishment of His kingdom on the earth. Obadiah and Jonah may be viewed for this purpose somewhat in the light of appendices to Amos-Nahum and Habakkuk as holding a similar position to Micah; whilst Malachi is God's appeal to the people to be ready for His coming.

It has not been attempted to give even a short syllabus of what each prophet dwells on, but only those events which, peculiar to each, show a gradual unfolding of revelation—marking a reason for the position of each writer in the order we have them. How wonderful are the arrangements of the Lord! How marvelous, too, that goodness which has revealed for His people's sake what He will yet do, furnishing them with words suited to their need, (Hos. 14,) and describing their position, and what their conduct should be (Habakkuk) in their trying circumstances. As we read of the events of the latter days, we cannot but remember that we are reading of what will take place after we leave this world, events of peculiar interest and importance to Israel and the Gentiles. Yet are they not of interest to us? We shall not be in the great tribulation; we shall not be able to sing " the song of Moses and of the Lamb." But do not these events as now unfolded interest us? Who is to be the leader in it all? For what purpose are these things to take place? He whom we know as Lord is the leader, and it is for His glory all these events will come to pass. We see in these prophecies Zion as the center towards which all eyes shall be turned; but it is Zion when the Lord is there; and we see Him as the object of the world's adoration, the King of the whole earth, whom we now know by grace, and praise on the ground of accomplished redemption, and with whom we shall be when these events come to pass, reigning with Dim over the earth. It is our Lord that is here exalted, our Savior that is to be worshipped, our God that is the subject of praise. He who has limited us with Himself in a marvelous manner, as our life and head. What, then, concerns Him should not be an object of indifference to us. May all that is connected with His future glory and manifestation as Lord of the whole earth, awaken in our hearts, as we read of it, joy and praise.

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