

Synthetic Bible Studies

Containing an outline study of every book of the Bible
with suggestions for Sermons, Addresses and
Bible Expositions

By

James M. Gray, D.D.

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LESSON TWENTY-THREE

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROPHETIC SCRIPTURES

Dr. Samuel J. Andrews in *GOD's Revelation of Himself to Man*, remarks upon the fact which every student of the Bible has observed, that none of the prophets in Judah or Israel from the time of Solomon down to the time when they began to write their prophecies, i. e., for two centuries, make any mention of the Messiah or His kingdom. And he accounts for this on the ground that at no time after the division of the kingdom could the coming of the Messiah have been to the nation at large an object of true spiritual desire or hope, for the reason that the moral conditions were wanting.

The promises respecting Him appealed to faith, and it was "only as the people were faithfully fulfilling their duties to Jehovah as the theocratic king that they could understand the nature of the higher blessings of the future kingdom and truly desire them."

In other words, the prophets could not speak of future spiritual blessings to those who had no ear to hear.

It was their immediate duty, therefore, to convince the people of their sins and seek to bring them to repentance; see for example the character of the utterances of Elijah and Elisha in the northern kingdom. As the sin had been national, so the repentance must be national, which was never the case.

The Psalms, many of which were written at this period, bear witness to the fact that there were

individuals who appreciated the Messianic hope, and longed for its fulfillment, but this was not the case of the nation at large.

Why Written Prophecy?

Written prophecy, which does not become a factor in revelation until about the eighth or ninth century B. C., was not really in accord with the true idea of the theocracy, as our author states, and its first appearance at about the date indicated marks an epoch in GOD's dealings with His people.

"His presence among them theretofore, assured them of the continued communications of His will as there might be need (Exodus 25:22)," and one way in which those communications were conveyed was through the words spoken by the prophets (Deuteronomy 18:18-22), whose utterances were for their own day and generation, and hence were not necessary to be written down.

When their utterances, however, came to be written down, and the transient word took on a permanent form, the change was very significant and ominous. It spoke of a future withdrawal of the Lord's presence, a consequent cessation of prophetic utterances, and hence a delay or postponement respecting the setting up of the Messianic kingdom. Compare Amos 8:11, 12, and Lamentations 2:9.

The prophet's words now were preserved for future generations, for it had become evident that both kingdoms, Judah and Israel, "though with unequal steps" would go steadily downward.

The kingdom of Israel was overthrown and carried into captivity by the Assyrians about 722 B. C., not to return again as yet to their former land in any national capacity. The crisis in the kingdom of Judah approached less rapidly, but 140 years later she too was carried away by the Babylonians. It is true that members of the tribes of Judah did after 70 years again return to the Holy Land, and with them, as well, representatives of the other tribes, and that Judah in that sense was restored to something like her former national life. But it must be remembered that it was only "something" like it and not the thing itself, inasmuch as she was always thereafter a vassal of one or the other of the ruling Gentile powers down until the day when, because of her crucifixion of the Messiah, she was at length scattered again, this time among all the nations of the earth, awaiting the consummation of those things spoken concerning her future in the prophets which we are soon to study.

The prophets, it will be seen, had a twofold mission, i. e., one for the immediate present, and the other for the remote future, their messages revolving around three points, viz:

- (1) "the blessings temporal and spiritual given by GOD to His covenant people if faithful;
- (2) the judgments coming upon them if unfaithful;
- (3) the renewed grace to them when repentant."

There is, moreover, great variety in the detail with which they speak, but their chief points of agreement are:

(1) that a day of righteous retribution is impending, the end of which will bring repentance, and prepare the way for the Messianic kingdom; these judgments affect Israel chiefly, but also the Gentile nations throughout the whole earth.

(2) The tribes of Israel will be regathered, and a remnant purified by discipline shall form the nucleus of the reconstituted nation, among whom the Lord will again dwell with blessings, temporal and spiritual.

(3) This reconstituted nation of Israel will be the germ, so to speak, of the Messianic kingdom and extend over the whole earth.

Why Address the Gentiles?

"But written prophecy embraces GOD's words addressed to many heathen, i. e., Gentile peoples also. These words could not in the nature of the case always have been spoken to them, and even so, they have long since ceased to exist as peoples. Why, then, written down and preserved? Not simply that we of these latter days may see their fulfillment, and thus have our faith confirmed, for their fulfillment cannot in many cases be proved because of our historical ignorance. They were written rather because the purpose of GOD in the Jews as a people, as wanderers and when restored and dwelling in their own land, brings them into continued relations to other peoples, and especially to those dwelling immediately around them; and although the earlier peoples, as Edom and Moab, Syria and Egypt, may cease to exist, yet other peoples arise, and the same relations, in substance, continue. As His own chosen nation, through whom He will reveal Himself to the nations, the Jews hold through all historical time an official position, and have a sacred character, and in the day of their restoration and of the judgment of the nations, the great question will be, How far have the other nations regarded them as His people, and so treated them?"

~ end of Lesson 23 ~
