

Synthetic Bible Studies

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

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LESSON THIRTY

NAHUM, ZEPHANIAH, HABAKKUK AND OBADIAH

The Prophecy of Nahum

I have done little original work on the four Minor Prophets and acknowledge my indebtedness to *The Bible Handbook* by Dr. Angus.

Isaiah concludes his work at about the end of Hezekiah's reign, which synchronizes with the captivity of the ten tribes of Israel by the Assyrians.

At this period of perplexity, to quote Dr. Angus, "When the overthrow of Samaria (the capital of Israel) must have suggested to Judah many fears for her own safety, when Jerusalem (the capital of Judah) had been drained of its treasure by Hezekiah in the vain hope of turning away the fury of the Assyrians from her border, and when distant rumors of the conquest of a part of Egypt by the same great power added still more to the general dismay, the prophet Nahum was raised up by the loving-kindness of the Lord to reveal His tenderness and power (1:1-8), to foretell the subversion of the Assyrians (1:9-12), the death of Sennacherib the Assyrian king and the deliverance of Hezekiah from his toils (1:10-15)."

"The book," to quote the same authority, "thus becomes a striking illustration of the moral use of prophecy as seen in its fitness to console the saint of GOD and strengthen him for present duties." The name of the prophet, by the way, means consolation.

After the consolatory introduction referred to above and which covers practically the whole of chapter 1, the prophet proceeds to predict in detail, and in most glowing colors, the destruction of Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian empire. Properly to grasp Nahum, therefore, one needs to compare it with Jonah already considered, of which it is a continuation and supplement in a sense.

"The two prophecies form connected parts of the same moral history; the remission of GOD's judgments being illustrated in Jonah, and the execution of them in Nahum. The devoted city had one denunciation more given a few years later, by Zephaniah 12:13), and shortly afterwards (606 B. C). the whole was fulfilled."

The Prophecy of Zephaniah

As in the case of Nahum little is known of the personal history of Zephaniah beyond the two facts stated in the first verse of his prophecy, the first bearing very briefly on his ancestry and the second on the period of his ministry.

About fifty years, more or less, have elapsed since the prophecy of Nahum, and Hezekiah has been succeeded by three of his descendants (II Kings, chaps. 20, 21). Manasseh and Amon were very idolatrous and wicked, but Josiah who is now upon the throne, is righteous and God-fearing.

The story of his zealous reign is given in the succeeding chapters of II Kings and should be read as preparatory to the study of this book, for Zephaniah, who prophesied doubtless in the earlier part of his reign must have assisted him very greatly in his efforts to restore the worship of the true GOD.

To quote Angus:

"The first chapter contains a general denunciation of vengeance against Judah and those who practiced idolatrous rites; Baal, his black-robed priests (Chemarims), and Malcham (Moloch), being all condemned, and declares '**the great day of trouble and distress**' to be at hand (1-2:3). The second chapter predicts the judgments about to fall on the Philistines, those especially of the sea-coasts (Cherethites), the Moabites, Ammonites, and Ethiopians; and describes in terms wonderfully accurate the desolation of Nineveh, prophecies which began to be accomplished in the conquests of Nebuchadnezzar.

"In the third chapter, the prophet arraigns Jerusalem, rebukes her sins, and concludes with the most animating promises of her future restoration, and of the happy state of the people of GOD in the latter days (3:1-7, 8-20).

"Coincidence of expression between Isaiah and Zephaniah are frequent, and still more between Zephaniah and Jeremiah. It may be added that the predictions of Jeremiah complete the view here given of the devastation to be effected by Chaldea in Philistia and Judah."

I cannot refrain from calling attention very particularly to the promises for the future as contained in 3:8-20, and which show that although these Minor Prophets, so-called, refer but

briefly to that period, (and yet perhaps in proportion after all, to the length of their discourses), still their deliverances thereupon are all in harmony with the teachings of the whole school of the prophets.

For example, in verse 8, observe the agreement with Joel concerning the gathering of the Gentile nations to judgment at the end of the present age. In verse 9, we seem to see these nations, or the spared and sifted remnant of them, at length converted to GOD and serving Him with a ready will. In verse 10 they are bringing the sons of Israel back to their own land, the second gathering of them, so to speak, as was explained in Isaiah. In verses 11-18, the cleansed, humble, trustful, rejoicing, nation of Israel appears, dwelling in their own land. In verses 19, 20 we find the restored and beloved people a praise and a blessing in the whole earth as foretold in the original promise to Abraham, and again and again pictured before us in the millennial Psalms. Verse 17 of this chapter will well repay careful meditation.

The old marriage covenant between the Lord and Israel is there depicted as gloriously restored anew (Isaiah 62:5; Hosea 2:19); the husband is rejoicing in His wife, resting in His love and joying over her with singing. The word for "rest" is translated in the margin "*be silent*," and this silence of the Lord towards His people is no longer the silence arising from forbearance in order to punish at last (Psalm 50:21), but because He has nothing more to reprehend.

The Burden of Habakkuk

Absolutely nothing is known of the personal history of Habakkuk, and but little definitely as to the time when he prophesied. He is placed by some, however, as successive to Zephaniah, for he seems to make no mention of Assyria and yet refers to what would appear to be the approach of the Babylonian invasion (1:6; 2:3; 3:2, 16-19). The book seems undoubtedly to have been written by himself, as we may judge from 1:2 and 2:1, 2.

His "burden" begins by lamenting the iniquity of his people (1:1-4). He then declares GOD's purpose of raising up the Chaldean nation as a scourge against them (vv.5-10). The probability is that at this time the Chaldeans (or Babylonians) were still a friendly nation (II Kings 20:12-19), but they were soon to march through the breadth of the land as a ravaging enemy.

There were really three invasions by the Babylonians, as II Kings showed us, in the reigns of Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah, and it is thought that in his description Habakkuk alludes to all three.

Verse 11 of chapter 1 might be taken as a prophecy of the disease that came over Nebuchadnezzar when, as a punishment for his pride, his reason was taken from him for a season. The chapter concludes with an expostulation to the Holy One for inflicting such judgment, and especially for using a nation to inflict them less righteous, as the prophet thinks, than themselves.

In chapter 2, he awaits GOD's answer to this expostulation (v. 1), and receives it (vv. 2-4). This answer is encouraging. The vision shall surely come and the just shall live by faith and wait for it.

The continuation of the chapter is a prediction of the judgments that shall fall on the Babylonians for their cruelty and idolatry.

"The prophet, hearing these promises and threatenings, concludes his book with a sublime song, both of praise and of prayer (chap. 3). He celebrates past displays of the power and grace of the Lord, supplicates GOD for the speedy deliverance of His people and closes by expressing a confidence in GOD which no change can destroy." - Angus.

Particular attention is called to the words of the prophet in chapter 2, verse 3, which the inspired writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, according to the law of double reference, applies evidently to the second coming of CHRIST (Hebrews 10:37, 38).

In the same manner notice the expression in verse 4 of the same chapter, "**The just shall live by his faith,**" and the application of it in such New Testament passages as Romans 1:17; 5:1; and Galatians 3:24.

The Vision of Obadiah

Obadiah, in all probability, received and delivered his vision at a much later period than the other seers grouped together in this lesson, but for convenience sake he is classed with them. Some think his period is shortly after the conquest of Judah by the Babylonians, and just before the conquest of Edom by the same world-power.

"Of all the nations who afflicted the Jews, the chief were the Assyrians, the Chaldeans and the Edomites; and three of the prophets were commissioned specially to pronounce their destruction. Nahum foretells the destruction of the Assyrian; Habakkuk, that of the Chaldeans, and Obadiah the destruction of Edom."

As Dr. Angus remarks, Israel had no greater enemy than the Edomites, though they were then close relatives.

"They were proud of their wisdom, (v. 8), and of their rocky and impregnable position, (v. 3). But the prophet foretells the uncovering of their treasures, and rebukes their unkind treatment of the Jews, their kinsmen, in rejoicing over their calamities, and encouraging Nebuchadnezzar utterly to exterminate them (Psalm 137:7); for all which an early day of retribution was to come; '**As thou hast done it shall be done unto thee**' (v. 15).

"But the chosen race themselves had just been carried into captivity; the Holy Land was deserted; and the chastisement denounced against the Edomites might therefore appear not to differ from that which had already inflicted upon the seed of Jacob. The prophet, therefore, goes on to declare that Edom should be as though it had never been, and should be swallowed up forever, while Israel should rise again from her present fall; should repossess not only her own land, but also Philistia and Edom; and finally rejoice in the holy reign of the promised Messiah."

~ end of Lesson 30 ~
