

Synthetic Bible Studies

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

By

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LESSON THIRTY-THREE

SUMMING UP THE ANTE-CAPTIVITY PROPHETS

In the reading of Andrews' valuable book already referred to, I have come across one or two chapters from which a few sentences or paragraphs might be culled and pieced together to make an interesting and instructive summary of the teachings of the prophets thus far considered, before we enter upon the epoch of the captivity in the study of Daniel.

Dr. Andrews points out that even Moses distinctly taught that there was a point in national transgression beyond which divine forbearance would not go, and that the time might come when, through unfaithfulness to their covenant, the Jews would cease to exist as a nation and be scattered over the earth (Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28).

This declaration of Moses we have seen repeatedly and distinctly announced by all the prophets with ever increasing fullness as the time drew near.

While the judgment referred to in these prophecies was the deportation of the Jews from their land and their subjection to the heathen nations, yet it had a larger meaning.

In establishing the theocracy, for example, the Lord entered into two relations:

- (1) that of King of the people, and
- (2) that of Proprietor to the land.

These relations were co-existent, and so long as He was their king, He dwelt in the land as His own, and His presence was their national preservation. Even if, for a time, He permitted their enemies to invade the land, it was for their punishment and reformation; but to permit them to be carried away to another land and His temple to be destroyed, was not compatible with His honor as their King dwelling among them. Therefore, when their sins had reached that degree that He must cast them out from their land, He Himself must first depart.

This departure of the Lord from the holy city and Temple as symbolized in Ezekiel 10 and 11, was the determining condition of the captivity marking, as it did, a change in His theocratic relation to the people that continues even to this day.

While they did not cease to be His covenant people (Leviticus 26:44), and His promises respecting the Messiah were not withdrawn, and He continued to accept their worship, yet He was no more reigning at Jerusalem.

Though the people returned from Babylon by and by and rebuilt the Temple, still the change continued. They were never again an independent nation under His immediate rule. For a brief period under- the Maccabees there was an assertion of freedom, yet the "eagles of Rome were already hovering over Jerusalem, and failing to discern JESUS as their Messiah, they ceased to be a people among the peoples of the earth."

It is thus plain that the return of a part from Babylonian exile was not the end of the captivity, or in any full sense the restoration, which cannot be until the Lord again dwells among them, ruling them through His King of the house of David.

Their partial restoration from Babylon had its purpose in affording an opportunity for the bringing of the Redeemer into the world by His birth of a virgin, and giving Him the opportunity to present Himself to them as their promised Messiah. Had they received Him He would have gathered them under His wings, but rejecting Him, they must again be visited with chastisement, and scattered among the nations till there should be found at last that remnant which should cry, "**Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord**" (Matthew 23:39).

Our author quotes Prof. Alexander, who says that "however frequent the people seem to be destroyed there will always be a surviving remnant, and however frequently the remnant may appear to perish, there will still be a remnant of the remnant left, and this indestructible residue shall be the holy seed which GOD "will plant in the land to be no more rooted out."

When this time shall come no one definitely knows, for the moral element overrules the chronological. In other words, GOD respects the free will of men, and though His purpose is sure to be accomplished, it must be through their voluntary cooperation.

When, therefore, Israel repents and submits to the will of GOD this time shall come.

What a stimulus, therefore, is there in such a thought for our prayers on behalf of Israel, that she may repent and receive JESUS, since so much of the glory of the church and the peace of the whole world are dependent thereupon!

Period of the Exile

Ezekiel and Daniel were the prophets of the exile.

Among those who were carried captive with the former, there were many who did not believe that Jerusalem would be destroyed by the Babylonians and cease to be the dwelling place of the Lord, and it was necessary, therefore, for the prophet to show them how unfounded their expectations were.

We have seen him do this in the vision which shadowed forth the departure of the visible glory of GOD from the Temple and the city before its overthrow (Ezekiel 9-11).

This glory was the symbol of the divine presence on Mount Sinai, and wherever it abode, there GOD dwelt.

For example, when the Tabernacle was set up in the wilderness His glory filled it (Exodus 40:34), where He continued to manifest Himself from between the cherubim until the Temple was built.

At the dedication of the latter, it also was filled with His glory (I Kings 8:10), and notwithstanding all their subsequent idolatry and wickedness, He thus continued to dwell with the people - until the captivity.

At this time, when He was about to permit the destruction of the Temple, His glory ascended first from the cherubim in the most holy place to the threshold of the house, and thence to the cherubim at the door of the east gate, finally leaving the city altogether and standing upon the Mount of Olives.

Ezekiel, as we have seen, tells us much of the religious condition of the exiles in Babylon, from which we learn that upon the larger part of them the captivity produced no effect. The evil influences around them infected them, and if they were repelled from idolatry in the grosser forms, yet their faith in their own covenant standing and in the promises of the Lord was weakened. There were a few, however, animated with holy zeal whose feelings are well described in such Psalms as the 137th, and it was those of this stamp who were returned at the close of the seventy years, and by whom the Temple and city were rebuilt.

Although Ezekiel refers to this return, yet, as we have already learned, his words looked beyond them and that event to the final remnant in the latter days, in whom the Messianic kingdom is to be set up and GOD's purposes fully realized.

A holy and obedient people shall at last be found and GOD will dwell among them.

It was the prophet Daniel whose prophecies most influenced the popular mind during the captivity, and gave more definite form to their Messianic conceptions. It was he, as we shall discover in our next chapter, who first set forth the Messianic kingdom in its temporal relations to the successive great kingdoms of the world.

The earlier prophets had spoken of the relation of the Jews to the smaller states round about them, but Daniel was to teach them the place which the Messianic kingdom should hold in the series of the great monarchies. Four should precede it, while it should constitute the fifth and last. It should not be established until the counsel of GOD respecting the four world monarchies had been accomplished, and until that time the theocratic people must take a position of subjection. Moreover, their national deliverance was inseparably connected with the coming of the Messiah, and until He came, they would be exposed to great oppression and affliction from these successive monarchies.

This leads us, by the way of introduction, to the consideration of the contents of the book of Daniel itself.

~ end of Lesson 33 ~
