

The Minor Prophets — Preface

Lectures Introductory to the Study of the Minor Prophets.

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Preface.

It seems due to the reader that he should be apprised that the following remarks on the Twelve Minor Prophets were not so formally delivered in the shape of lectures as those which compose the companion volume that appeared in the beginning of this year, on the Five Books of Moses. Lectures indeed the one may be called no less than the other. But in the case of the prophetic books there was an opportunity for questions which led to long digressions. These have been retained in the volume now printed rather in deference to the strong wishes of some who heard them, than in accordance with the feelings of the author, who cannot but acknowledge that they somewhat awkwardly interrupt now and then the course of the observations on the books immediately before the mind. Though this is a defect beyond doubt in a literary point of view, it is trusted that what is here presented to the reader, even in answer to questions diverging from the subject, will be found to promote edification through the grace of the Lord Jesus.

It may be added here that I have availed myself of Dr. Pusey's publication on the earlier of the Minor Prophets.* His researches, especially on the Hebrew idiom, are entitled to respect; but he is far too much swayed by patristic and mediæval commentators. With his reverence for the Holy Scriptures, with his piety, one entirely sympathizes. I humbly think, however, that he fails as much as anywhere else in a province where he least suspects it. Instead of censuring his church views as too high, I avow that they seem to my mind incalculably lower than what the New Testament teaches us, especially in the development given by the apostle Paul to the mystery he reveals in the Spirit as to Christ and as to the church; for modern high-churchism is but an effort to revive that system of early departure from apostolic doctrine which we find generally in the Fathers so-called. Its essence consists in lowering the Christian and the church, from heavenly relationship in union with the ascended Christ, to a mere earthly elongation, with improvements and fuller light, of the Jewish economy. But this really closed before God in the cross, though not outwardly and finally judged till the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple.

*The Minor Prophets with a Commentary Explanatory and Practical, and Introductions to the several Books. By the Rev. E. B. Pusey, D.D., Regius Professor of Hebrew, and Canon of Christ Church. Parts i -iv., Hosea to Nahum. Oxford: Parker & Co., etc.1860-1871.

The πρώτον ψεῦδος of this school, ancient or modern, is at bottom the same which underlies their rationalistic adversaries, little as either seem to be aware of it. They both fail in seeing the total ruin and judgment of the first man down to the disappearance of the Jewish system, and the setting up of one new man, wherein is neither Jew nor Greek, in Christ risen from the dead, and glorified at

the right hand of God, who, having accomplished eternal redemption, sends down thereon the Holy Ghost both to seal believers individually, and to baptize them into one body — Christ's body, the church of God.

The intelligent Christian reader can hardly overlook that this is the grand truth which pervades the writings of St. Paul; that up to the cross the trial was being made in every form, whether man as such, no matter how helped by law, ordinance, priesthood, at last even by the mission of Messiah Himself in flesh, could retrieve what was lost; that the result then above all was man's complete and proved inability to remedy the evil, or to hold fast any favours bestowed meanwhile; and that thereon, in the rejection of Christ by the Jew and the Gentile, God effects redemption by His blood, and raises Him up — the beginning, the firstborn from the dead — head of a new creation, and of the church His body. Incarnation presented the person of the Saviour; but it is only in resurrection, after having finished the work given Him to do in His atoning death, that He became head over all things to the church, which is His body. It is no question of reinstating Israel or man: the rejected person and ministry of the Lord demonstrated all flesh to be too far gone for this; for even the incarnate Son of God was refused and put to death, having laboured in vain, as He Himself says in Isaiah 49, and as the Gospels abundantly show.

Hence it became a question of sovereign grace on God's part in Christ as the Second Man risen from the dead and gone into heaven. He is thus the life-giving Spirit who, having won the victory over all temptation, and annulled the power of Satan, and endured the righteous judgment of God due to the first man, is now in resurrection become the head of a new family. "And as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly; and as we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." (1 Cor. 15) Thus, and thus only, grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord, and this founded on the redemption which is in Him.

The more this is weighed, the more will its importance be felt: and the very grave difference between theology in general and the revealed truth of Christianity. I do not speak only of the gross ignorance displayed in the idea of a constant sacrifice, the sacrifice of Christ continued in the Eucharist, which obscures as much as is conceivable the truth of God both as to the close of the first man in death and as to the setting up of the Second in resurrection, and thus leaves no room (save by the most glaring inconsistency) for the new creation and the Holy Ghost uniting us to the head in heaven. No thoughtful mind can wonder that the system which let in this error went farther, and deprived all but the clergy of that cup which bears witness to the shed blood of the Redeemer, and to the sins of believers washed away thereby. No wonder that it fell into the notion of concomitancy; and that, to justify its bad practice in this respect, it took refuge in the equally bad principle that in the consecrated bread or body is the blood of Christ. It is thus therefore consistently characterised by its comparatively modern sacrament of non-redemption, as another has well said. For without the shedding of blood is no remission; and if the blood as a doctrine be still in the body, so that the laity eating only the wafer partake of both flesh and blood, it is clearly enough implied that the blood can not be shed. They do not believe that all Christians are priests.

It is remarkable, too, that Puritanism is as deaf to the voice of the revealing Spirit on this head as either of its adversaries; and this in all its forms, Calvinistic at least as much so as Arminian. They both think that the flesh is not so bad that it cannot be acted on for God by Christ using the law of God, and giving it power through the Spirit. The Puritan school trust not to rites or ordinances like the Patristic; but they cling with even greater tenacity to the rule of the moral law. It is evident that on one side or the other it is but a renewal of the old question of the Galatian brethren, who,

having been beguiled by an infusion of both, are censured by the indignant apostle as fallen from grace, and summoned earnestly to stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ made us free, instead of entangling themselves again in a yoke of bondage. To the dead and risen Christ we now exclusively belong, in order that we may bring forth fruit to God. Even had we been circumcised the eighth day, and were we of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Judah, of the family of David, Hebrew of Hebrews, we ought as Christians to recognize with joy that we have been made dead to the law by the body of Christ in order to our being for another, Him who was raised from the dead. The Puritan scheme, no less than the Patristic, is adulterous according to the emphatic figure of the apostle; for they wed us to both husbands, the law and Christ, instead of owning that we have died to the one, and belong now freely and holily to the other.

Christianity stands in the brightest contrast; and as it treats all who believe as already brought nigh to God, made kings and priests to God even now, so it calls all such to eat of the bread and drink of the cup, and thus to show forth the Lord's death till He come. It tells the baptized, not merely that their sins are forgiven but that they are dead to sin, baptized not to a living Messiah like the disciples in the days of His flesh but to His death, and therefore by it buried with Him to death: so that we know that our old man has been crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be annulled that we should no longer serve sin. For he that has died is freed from sin.

The contrast of this is as complete with Protestants as with Romanists. Not a single creed, article, or service in Christendom sets forth the truth which the apostle shows to be signified in the initiatory institution of Christianity! Not seeing the total ruin of man as such, and still regarding him as in a state of probation like the Jew under law (not as lost), they fail to seize and confess the mighty deliverance which grace has wrought in Christ and gives to those who believe. They ignore Christ's assurance that the believer does not come into judgment, but is passed from death into life; for they assert their faith that He will come to be their Judge. They do not hold that all believers are saints now on earth responsible to walk accordingly, but they pray that God may make them to be numbered with His saints in glory everlasting. They beseech Him to save His people and bless His heritage, as if they were Jews waiting for Messiah's advent, instead of Christians already saved by grace and blessed with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ. Instead of worshipping our God and Father in spirit and truth, with the happy consciousness that they are in Christ, and that the law of the Spirit of life in Him has freed them from the law of sin and death, they cry to God rather out of distance and misery, as tied and bound with the chain of their sins. Hence the habitual tone of what is imagined to be Christian worship is really a poor iteration of the Psalms of David, and by some a wholesale accommodation of the entire collection to their use, instead of drawing near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, as those who have boldness to enter into the holy of holies by the blood of Jesus, and offering continually to God the sacrifice of praise, that is, the fruit of the lips confessing Jesus' name.

Far from working any deliverance in the present fallen estate of Christendom, Dr. Pusey and his fellows have made no small accession to one of the leading currents of unbelief in our day, which are all flowing fast toward the predicted apostacy. I do not doubt that he and a few others of pious feeling in the party shrank from the growing worldliness, the carnality, and the irreverence of ordinary Protestantism. But how did they seek to remedy the mischief? Not by searching the living word of God, but by a revived study of the Fathers; not by a renunciation of all they found in their own ecclesiastical position or ways condemned by Scripture, but by a vain effort to amend ill by rubrical punctiliousness; not by a deepening entrance into the truth and grace of God revealed in the apostolic writings, but by turning again to the weak and beggarly elements whereunto they desire

again to be in bondage — a resuscitation of that Judaising of Christianity against which the blessed apostle of the Gentiles fought all through his ministry so vigorously as to show this to be the true hinge of a faithful or falling church. This system of course tinges deeply Dr. P.'s commentary on the Minor Prophets, and necessarily vitiates its character for those who distinguish the church of God from the Jew no less than the Gentile.

For the consequence of this error is that the proper and distinctive privileges of the Christian and of the church are never enjoyed. A disorganized family is not set right by losing sight of their own relationship; and while conscious in measure of their faults, trying to walk better — not as children, but as servants, with whom they have insensibly confounded themselves. And this confusion I press, not only as a grievous loss to the children of God, but yet more as an unbelieving dishonour done to the incomparable grace wherein we stand; above all to Him whose accomplished redemption is the only key to our blessing, and the righteous ground of reconciliation to God.

Along with ignorance of our own heavenly relationship in union with our glorified head goes the denial of the call of Israel to earthly supremacy. This God reserves for His ancient people. They failed to make it good of old, because they tried to hold it under condition of their own obedience, and so broke down completely — a failure aggravated incalculably by their rejection of the Messiah and of the gospel. But divine mercy has pledged itself to give them repentance and restoration, yea, far more than all they lost, under Messiah returning to reign over the earth and under the new covenant. Meanwhile the Gentile, wise in his own conceit, flatters himself that the branches were broken off that he might be grafted in; he is high-minded, and does not fear, because he sets Matt. 16: 18, ill-understood, against the plain warning of Rom. 11. The Gentile has not continued in God's goodness; and yet he presumes that he shall not be cut off, and that the Jew cannot be grafted in again, in the face of the clearest prediction that blindness in part (for it has never been total) is happened to Israel until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in, when all Israel shall be saved, the Deliverer coming out of Zion and turning away ungodliness from Jacob.

Christendom denies these truths; and consequently we see not Romanism only but Protestantism seeking earthly glory and influence: the latter, it is true, willing for it to be the world's slave, the other ever seeking to be the world's mistress. But the church, rejoicing in her own place as the heavenly bride of Christ, was so much the more bound to confess the earthly place of power and dignity in store for converted Israel in the future, instead of coveting it now for herself, and straining after it by force or fraud. If we have Christ's mind in intelligence, we ought to have His mind in moral purpose, who, though divine, emptied Himself, taking a bondman's form, being born in likeness of men; and when found in fashion as a man, humbled Himself, becoming obedient as far as death, yea, death on the cross. We are all Christ's epistle, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God: how are we manifesting Christ?

Those who fail to hold fast and rightly apply these truths are, in my judgment, incapable of soundly expounding the Old Testament, and the Prophets in particular, whatever may be their merits in other respects, which I trust I should not be slow cordially to own and profit by. They are necessarily wrong more or less as to the government of the world no less than as to the church, and even as to salvation. They confound law and grace, heaven and earth, present and future, because they confound Israel with the church which is now called out for spiritual blessing in the heavenlies. The interpretation of the entire Bible is deeply affected by this difference; and so is our spiritual communion and our daily walk and worship. The Saviour remains unchangeable in person (blessed be God.); for He is the same yesterday, today, and for ever; but it would be hard to say what else does not suffer by the common traditional ignoring of revealed truth. And even the Saviour is far

more obscurely seen and less enjoyed as the rule.

If this be true, as I am firmly persuaded, no apology is needful to press the importance of that truth which may by grace deliver from such a swamp of error, and help to set the Christian in view of his own proper heritage. The reader of this book will find that I have by grace sought throughout rightly to divide the word of truth, striving diligently to stand approved to God, and not as a workman that has to be ashamed. May the same grace bless the reader abundantly!

INTRODUCTION.

As for the chronological order of the Minor Prophets, it appears to be substantially maintained in the common arrangement, of course leaving room for such an exception as proves the rule. Hosea, for instance, is very properly put first, followed regularly by Joel and Amos. Of these two I cannot but think that as Joel did not begin to prophesy as early as Hosea, so on the other hand the beginning of Amos marks that Joel's testimony was already complete and known. (Compare Joel 3: 16 with Amos 1: 2.) In the Septuagint the order is Hosea, Amos, Micah, Joel; but there need be no hesitation in adhering to the Hebrew arrangement, which puts Hosea first for all Israel, especially Ephraim, Joel next but the first for the narrower range of Jerusalem.

Obadiah seems to have his date the least defined by internal marks. What has been employed to prove a late date is invalid, from forgetting that the prophetic vision presents things future as already seen. For present time with a prophet is when a prophecy is accomplished, not when it is given. I believe he was early, not late. Obadiah naturally brings in Jonah,* who may have been placed exceptionally as already referred to. Jonah is usually set earlier, but there is a good deal tending to show that his visit to Nineveh was under the reign of Pul (=Vul-lush or Iva-lush of the Assyrian monuments), which would reduce the date by more than a half a century, and place Jonah regularly in the order of time among the prophetic books. Then he has such a very peculiar place of witness that it would not at all have suited this glorious constellation of twelve stars if he had been put at their beginning; it would have seemed to give prominence to what was by the way, so to speak. Hence it appears to me that Jonah is ranged, if not chronologically, at least with moral beauty, exactly in the proper place. Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah; but the less yields to the greater. And so they are classed in the Bible. Nahum, with Nineveh as the object of judgment, naturally precedes Habakkuk, who looks at the Chaldee; and Zephaniah is the last of those lesser lights before the captivity of Babylon.

{*Jonah stands alone among the prophets in being sent to the chief city of Assyria, the great Gentile antagonist of Israel while still owned as the people of Jehovah. It is remarkable that, standing thus isolated among the prophets, it is the only one of the Minor Prophets which begins with "and," translated "now" in the Authorized Version.}

First then come the Greater Prophets, each in his own order, — Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel, without entering now upon the place assigned to the latter in the Hebrew Canon, which the Jews have variously sought to explain. But if we speak of Greater Prophets, we must beware of the error which would impute to the least an inspiration inferior to the greater. It is a question only of extent and variety in their written testimony. And it is worthy of note, as has been observed, that the three longest were led of God to adopt the language and thoughts of some of the shortest prophecies. It is also to be noted, that four or five of the earlier Minor Prophets preceded even Isaiah.

Then follow the twelve Minor Prophets, beginning again with the earlier and closing with those after the captivity. Thus if Zephaniah followed Isaiah, he is necessarily excluded from such a

place, because he is classed with the shorter Prophets. Isaiah naturally and strictly takes the first place among the Greater Prophets, who are put exactly in their chronological order from first to last. And if Ezekiel lived at the same time with Jeremiah, the former was out of the land, while Jeremiah was in it or only swept down with the last remnant into Egypt. Daniel, as is known, lived the latest of the four Greater Prophets. Then we begin the Minor Prophets and go through a similar series, the only one who can be said to be taken out of his order being Jonah for the reason just suggested, though it is not improbable that the chronological place is preserved as well as the moral in the wisdom of God.

Hence any arrangement which places Zephaniah before Habakkuk would seem more than questionable. He appears for several reasons, minute in themselves but not without weight, to have been a trifle later, but substantially there is but little difference. On the whole I consider that the order (as they stand in the Hebrew Bible and English as in other versions) is entitled to respect, and that the Jews were more right than those who put Zephaniah before Habakkuk. It seems to be most probable, to say the least, that, though contemporary, Zephaniah was rather the later of the two. But the difference is only of a few years; if it were after all about half-a-dozen, there is no great matter for contention in it. Unhappily those who toil so keenly for perishable food like this, which profits in nothing those occupied therewith, are apt to overlook or refuse the food that abides to life everlasting.

Then Haggai clearly comes first in order of time among the last, worthily followed by his contemporary Zechariah, as both were by Malachi, who concludes the roll not more certainly in fact than in the tone and character of his message. The godly from among the Jews are left awaiting Jehovah-Messiah and His immediate forerunner.

Archbishop Usher was certainly a justly valued authority on these matters; but his chronology was, it is understood, adjusted not always for the better by those charged with going over the Authorized Version for the last time less than a hundred years ago. Even Usher's own arrangement has not always commanded the assent of those who believed the scriptures as firmly as himself. We may however come to the conclusion, and, I think, with fair if not always full evidence, that substantially the Greater Prophets and the Lesser are in their chronological order with the single exception of Jonah, if indeed this when fully considered be really one. The three later in the last series, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, were unquestionably post-captivity prophets; as Zephaniah brings us down to the latest point before the captivity. We are perfectly certain of the general epoch of most because they state it themselves so distinctly as to leave scarce any room for that misdirected ingenuity of unbelief which amuses itself and perplexes the simple by incessant efforts to shake all that is received, small or great; but which alas! exerts itself not least when it can hope to shake what most glorifies God and abases man.

As to subject-matter, the following sketch of these twelve prophets may suffice.

HOSEA is divided into two sections. First, he gives us Israel and Judah rejected after the warning of Jezreel, a dim intimation of the call of the Gentiles, and a distinct prediction that Judah and Israel should be restored and even re-united; a pleading and a promise; a sketch of their anomalous state at present, and an assurance of their final blessedness as a nation seeking Jehovah and the true David their King. Next, he sets out the wrongs of Israel, with the expostulations and threats of God; and, finally, their repentance and communion with Him.

JOEL, from the ruin caused by various insects, warns of the northern army and its devastations, partially then, fully in the last days of this age, followed by the day of Jehovah, as a

ground on both sides for humiliation before Him; and predicts the outpouring of the Spirit, deliverance in Zion, and the general judgment of the nations.

AMOS rehearses the ways of God not only with Israel, but with the neighbouring nations; then takes up Israel specifically — not on broad grounds of a moral kind only, but of peculiar favour; points out their guilt of refusing His testimony, which should none the less be verified in the judgment of the mass, and in the deliverance of the righteous few, and promises in the end the rearing up again of the fallen tabernacle of David and the renewed blessing of Israel.

OBADIAH, in a singularly vivid strain tinged with pathos yet stern, sets out God's call among the nations against Edom, who, spite of his pride of strength, must come down and be spoiled beyond precedent by treacherous hands, his wisdom and might failing to stave off destruction, because of heartless malice against his brother Jacob; for in truth the day of Jehovah was near on all the nations, but on Zion should be deliverance, and Jacob should inherit the earth, Esau being put down and judged; for the kingdom shall be Jehovah's.

JONAH next shows by his mission to the Gentiles that God reserved His title to pity the worst of the nations when repentant at His word; that effectual service needs the previous lesson of death and resurrection; and that even so he who is most nearly bound up with Him must bow to His grace to others and bless Him, instead of resting in his own privileges to the falsifying of His name.

MICAH judges the people as a whole, Samaria and Jerusalem being prominent, not only for iniquity and idolatry, but for refusal of Jehovah's words. He pronounces the land polluted, and holds out, especially for the heads and princes, the desolation of Zion, but its establishment in the last days by Jehovah, when they are hard pressed in the last siege after having been given up because of their rejection of Christ, who is to be their peace when the Assyrian reappears- in the end, and who is to make the remnant of Jacob a blessing as well as an object of fear in the day when Jehovah cuts off all evil of men or demons. Then he concludes with a final homily on the immutably righteous ways of Jehovah, who could not be put off by rites or sacrifices, but hates and must judge a people so false, yet will perform to the children in the last days the truth to Jacob, the mercy to Abraham, which He swore to their fathers from the days of old.

NAHUM, in contrast with Jonah, declares the vengeance of Jehovah on Nineveh, but does not keep back His goodness to such as trust in Him. Did the Assyrian imagine against Jehovah a counsellor of Belial? Utter destruction should come such as the world never saw before, such as will be seen again when the last Assyrian falls for ever. No storm of lightning or thunder ever burst with such images of judgment like our prophet's scathing denunciation of Nineveh, especially in chapters 2, 3.

HABAKKUK furnishes the exercises of one troubled by the iniquity of the Jews crying for judgment, and then because it is executed by those more wicked than they; who is told to wait for the judgment, but meanwhile to live by faith. He then details the wickednesses of the wicked which ensure his destruction; and, finally, to Jehovah in His holy temple, and all the earth enjoined to keep silence, he pours forth his prayer with a full vision of divine judgment, which at length falls unsparingly, and expresses his joyful trust in God, come or come not what will of His outward blessings meanwhile.

ZEPHANIAH proclaims the utter destruction of the land of Judah and Jerusalem, in the approaching day of Jehovah, for their idolatry, violence, and deceit, when incredulity would save no more than filthy lucre; but he lets the righteous see ("it may be ye shall be hid in the day of Jehovah's anger") that, as it is the day of Jehovah, none should escape, whether around them like the

Philistines, Moabites, or Ammonites, or afar off like the Assyrians; least of all she that was filthy and polluted, the oppressing city, clothed with privilege, yet so much the guiltier — Jerusalem! He concludes with the richest comfort to the godly remnant, who are called to wait on Jehovah till He executes His sentence on the assembled kingdoms, delivers His people now poor and meek, rejoices over Zion, rests in His love, and makes them a name and a praise among all people of the earth.

HAGGAI reproves the people for their lack of faith and zeal in building the house of Jehovah, and convicts them of His controversy with them for occupation on behalf of their own houses; comforts them with the assurance of the Spirit's permanency of action with them; declares that the latter glory of the house will be greater than the former when Messiah shakes all the nations, and assures of the overturning of all kingdoms when the heavens are shaken, but of the choice of Zerubbabel as representing Christ in that day, a signet for Jehovah.

ZECHARIAH regards Jerusalem as under the imperial powers, one power ousting another till the due time is come, and after the glory Jehovah dwells in Zion. Jerusalem is pardoned and justified; the sign of wisdom in government is there when He brings forth Messiah the Branch, as well as perfect administrative order; iniquity and idolatry are judged; the powers pass in review; and the Branch is to build the temple, and sit a priest on His throne. In the second part of the book the restoration of Jerusalem is pledged when the question is put as to facts; but they are still under responsibility, though a vision of glory follows. Jehovah assures that He will protect His house; introduces Christ in humiliation, but connects Him also with the day of glory and deliverance, when Judah puts down Javan or Greece, and the houses of Judah and Joseph shall be as though He had not cast them off. Then follow the details of Christ's rejection, and of Antichrist judged; the gathering of all nations against Jerusalem, which is delivered by Jehovah- Messiah, once pierced, now mourned by them; but a fountain is opened in Jerusalem for cleansing. Then false prophets are judged, and Christ's humiliation once more in view, and a remnant spared, and Jerusalem captured in part but delivered by Jehovah, who makes her the holy metropolis of the earth when He reigns and judges all nations.

MALACHI bears to us the burden of the word of Jehovah to Israel: His reproaches fill the prophet's spirit. And no wonder, for the returned remnant had failed completely, as left by Zechariah on the ground of responsibility, whatever long-suffering or active grace from God might do for them. Jacob, though loved, profaned and was weary of His service and holiness; the priests too had corrupted the covenant of Levi, and He had made them to His own grief contemptible. There remained nothing but for Him to send His messenger and come Himself; but who should abide the day of His coming? Yet He owns with tenderness and complacency the remnant that spoke often to one another in His fear, surrounded by the incredulous hypocrisy of the Jews. And those righteous ones should be His in the day that should burn as an oven for all the proud; but for those that feared Him the Sun of righteousness should arise with healing in His wings, and they themselves go forth as calves of the stall treading down the wicked in that day. Finally, he reminds them of the law of Moses, and promises Elijah the prophet before that day to turn the hearts of the people, lest His coming should be only for a curse.

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