Zephaniah - Commentaries by John Gifford Bellett

Minor Prophets, Zephaniah 2:1-15: Perfect Judgment

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Zephaniah 1-2

In this day of the Chaldean, on which we are now looking, with Zephaniah, everything, as it were, is judged. As in the Apocalyptic day, or as before the great white throne, all is judged personally or individually, so now in the light of the sword of Nebuchadnezzar, all is judged nationally. There is Judah, and there is Jerusalem; and the people around Edom, the Philistines, the Ammonites, the Ethiopians and the Assyrians; north, south, east, and west, all come in for this common and complete exposure, and that, too, in all its minute distinctions; the remnant of Baal, the name of the Chemarims with the priests, idolaters, those who swear by the Lord and by Malcham, the backsliders and the careless, and those who wear strange apparel, are all severally visited (Zeph. 1:4-8); and the candle of the Lord searches out those who are settled on their lees, and who despise the fear of judgment (Zeph. 1:12). Nothing escapes. All is naked and open to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. And the Judge of all the world does right; they that have deserved many stripes get them, while others are beaten with as few; for, God is no respecter of persons. He renders to every man according to his deeds.

But, “the remnant according to the election of grace” are recognized here in Zephaniah, as everywhere. “The meek of the earth,” they are called; and they are told to wait on the Lord under the hope that they shall be hid in the day of the Lord’s anger (Zeph. 2:3; Zeph. 3:8).

Minor Prophets, Zephaniah 1:8-18: Coming Judgment

But the Chaldean was not only a real, but a representative, or mysterious person. He stands forth in the prophets as telling us of coming and final judgments. His sword visited not only Judah and Jerusalem, but the surrounding nations. His was a day in which the God of all the earth was rising up, and the world had to keep silence. It was a miniature or inchoative judgment of all the nations. It was “the day of the Lord,” in spirit or in principle. The sword was furbished for the slaughter. The dominion went from “the daughter of Jerusalem,” for the house of David was reprobate, and the Chaldean took the throne under God, so to speak, away from the Jew.

Judgment, however, never closes the scene. As we said, glory touches judgment, in the ways of God. Judgment cleans out the vessel, and then glory fills it. It takes away what hinders the presence of the Lord, and then the kingdom is established and displayed, as Zephaniah, together with all the prophets, show us. The Apocalypse is the great closing witness of this. There judgment makes way for glory again; and that, finally—in other words, that which offends and does iniquity, the great reprobate, apostate energies, are all judged and removed, and the day of millennium brightness begins to run its course.

It is judgment, judgment; over them sing, over them sing; in continuous succession, because no steward of God has been faithful or given an account of his stewardship. Adam, the Jew, the Gentile, the candlestick, all in their day have been untrue to Him that appointed them, and “God standeth in the congregation of the mighty, He judgeth among the gods.” The garden was lost by Adam; the land of their fathers by their children, or Canaan by Israel; the Gentile was as faithless as they, and power passed from the head of gold, to the breasts and arms of silver, thence to the belly and thighs of brass, and then to the legs of iron, and the feet which were of iron and clay. There was no delivering up to God of that which had been received from Him. The stewards have been removed, one after the other, and their stewardships have been taken away from them, in the stead of their delivering of them up, or giving a just account of them. So it has ever been, and so is it still, and there is no exception to this until we look at Jesus.

Minor Prophets, Zephaniah 1:1-7: History and Prophecy

Very commonly in the prophets, glory touches judgment. These are their themes, with the iniquity that provokes the judgment, and the characters that attach to the glory that follows.

Zephaniah: History and Prophecy

But these things, judgment on iniquity and glory succeeding, have been, again and again, in the history, as they are, again and again, in the prophecy, of Scripture.

The day of Noah was such a day—a day when judgment introduced glory, or a new world. So the judgment on Egypt was accompanied or waited on by the deliverance of Israel, their triumphant song, the presence of the glory in the midst of them, and their journey onward to the land of promise. So the judgment on the Canaanites or Amorites was at once followed by Israel’s taking of their inheritance.

The day of Nebuchadnezzar was a kindred day of judgment. The spirit of prophecy lingers over it. Not only does it anticipate it in earlier prophets, as Isaiah and Micah, but it is at the time or about the time, poured out very largely, as Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah witness.

And that day, the day of the Chaldean invasion and triumph, was truly a remarkable crisis. The iniquity of the kingdom of Judah was then full, as that of the Amorites had been in the day of Joshua. Sad, however, it is indeed, that things should have taken such a turn; that the iniquity

of the Jew was now full, and that the Gentile was called out to judge it, as once the iniquity of the Gentile had been full, and the Jew, the man of God, was called out to judge it.

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