Zephaniah - Commentaries by Alfred Henry Burton

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E. P. asks with reference to Zephaniah 3:9 — “Does it mean that all nations shall be turned to one language in that day?”

The passage refers no doubt to the time of the millennium. Some have taken it to mean that at that time only one language will be spoken universally, so as to enable all nations to serve the Lord with one consent.

But speaking of the same time Isaiah 19:18 tells us that “five cities in the land of Egypt shall speak the language of Canaan,” &c. Why limit it to five if all nations spoke one and the same language?

It seems to us that the “pure language” (or, lip) is explained by verse 13, “the remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth.” The object of having one universal language would be to enable the nations to have easy intercourse the one with the other; but the verse is speaking of their relations with the Lord, and for this the important thing is not a question of philology but of the moral state of the heart, and the sincerity of utterance.

In that day it will not be a drawing nigh with the mouth, and an honoring with the lips, while the heart is far away (Matt. 15:8).

It seems to refer especially to “the scattered nation,” i.e., Israel, for we must not forget that amongst the nations some will only yield a feigned obedience, which would not be a “pure lip” (see margin of Ps. 18:44, 66:3). When at the day of Pentecost the company of disciples began to speak forth the wonderful works of God in every language under heaven, this was said by Peter to be akin to what Joel prophesied of in connection with this very same period to which Zephaniah refers, and this leads one to suppose that different languages will then exist. But the Spirit will be outpoured in that day, and we can well believe that those who will go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts (Zech. 14.) will be enabled so to do it that no discordant note shall be heard. It will be a day for the display of “the powers of the world to come” (Heb. 6.).

Lord, haste the day when all shall own Thy rightful sway!

ED.