

OLD TESTAMENT SURVEY

LESSON SERIES

Old Testament Survey - Unit IV
The Books of Prophets during the Judah's Fall and Decline
The Books of Zephaniah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Jeremiah

for

CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE
CHRISTIAN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
www.cistonline.org

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**THE PROPHETS OF THE PERIOD OF
THE DIVIDED KINGDOM****BOOKS OF THE PROPHETS DURING THE DECLINE AND FALL OF JUDAH,
934-586 B.C.****(THE FALL OF THE ASSYRIAN EMPIRE, AND BABYLONIAN SUPREMACY,
612 TO 538 B.C.)****INTRODUCTION**

The first period of the prophets, THE DECLINE AND FALL OF THE NORTHERN KINGDOM, closed with the ministries of Isaiah and Micah. It is generally supposed that they completed their prophetic careers early in the long and evil reign of Manasseh, who may very well have been the direct cause of the death of one or both of them. After their death, there was prophetic silence in Jerusalem and Judah for more than fifty years.

The wicked Manasseh was on the throne from 697 until about 642 B.C., and his son Amon, who followed in his father's evil footsteps, reigned for another two years, or to about 640 B.C. All the evils of Baalism and idolatry and imported heathen institutions, which both Israel and Judah had known in the past, were revived and allowed full sway in the nation during these years.

Young Zephaniah was the first to break the long prophetic silence, but his young contemporary, Jeremiah, was soon to follow him.

These young prophets came directly from the Lord, with a message of utmost urgency, a prophecy of judgment and doom upon the wicked nation. Like all true prophets, however, they aimed to arouse the moral and religious conscience of the people, and thus to render unnecessary the fulfillment of their grim predictions of Captivity and Exile.

Both Zephaniah and Jeremiah lived with the constant reminder that God's judgment had already been visited upon the Northern Kingdom, who were now in Exile, and that this judgment could be repeated for Judah.

Although the prophets Nahum and Habakkuk are not so well known as some of the others, their messages were important both spiritually and historically for then and for succeeding generation.

THE BOOK OF ZEPHANIAH

The young prophet Zephaniah was a person of quality. He was a member of the the royal family, and a poet. He was a great-great grandson of King Hezekiah, and a distant cousin of the present king Josiah, and a relative of the prophet Isaiah.

According to his opening sentence, the prophecies of Zephaniah were given "in the days of Josiah." Josiah came to the throne of Judah about 639 B.C., when he was eight years old, and ruled Judah until his sudden death in battle, in 608 B.C. He was the best King

Judah ever had. It is likely that Zephaniah was living in Jerusalem at the time, and had an important influence on the religious education and reforms of the young king.

Whether Zephaniah preached before or after Josiah's reforms cannot be decided with certainty. The book does portray the kind and depth of religious decline which immediately preceded Josiah's reforms. In an age which had lapsed into syncretism, Zephaniah attacked the adoption of foreign customs (1:4-9), including in his denunciation the Canaanite Baal, the Ammonite Milcom, and Assyrian astral worship. With vehemence he decried violence, fraud, idolatry, pride. Judah was completely and thoroughly corrupt (3:3-4).

Probably, therefore, the time is fairly early in the reign of Josiah before the reforms of 621 B.C.

ZEPHANIAH'S PROPHECY - THE CONTENT

The Lord has placed upon the prophet Zephaniah the burden of declaring His judgment and doom upon the guilty Jerusalem and Judah. It is more than an arraignment or indictment of the nation; it is a warning that time is up, and that doom is imminent. **"For the day of the Lord is at hand.. The great day of the Lord is near" (1:7; 14).**

Zephaniah saw the Day of the Lord in which judgment would fall upon **"those who do not seek the Lord or inquire of Him"** (1:6). The Lord's **"jealous wrath"** would erupt against Judah in a day of distress and anguish, ruin and devastation, darkness and gloom, clouds and thick darkness (1:14-18). God's own people stand under the threat of a great cult day when they themselves will be the sacrifice (1:7).

The nations too stand under the sovereign judgment of the Lord, who will hold them responsible (2:4-15). The purpose of judgment, however, is not destruction of either Judah or the nations, but rather, the redemption of both. Both Judah and the nations are to be judged so that the Lord may gather a remnant of the **"humble and lowly"** who will **"call on the name of the Lord and serve him with one accord"** (3:9).

Zephaniah closes his book with an Eschatological Hymn of Salvation (3:14-20). The hymn is a song of rejoicing by Zion and all the redeemed of the earth, in praise of the Lord, who has taken away the judgment against them.

In the book of Zephaniah we have a complete cycle of Divine prophecy:

- The judgment against a wicked and disobedient people;
- Their purification and redemption;
- The restoration of the faithful remnant, and their glorious future.

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF ZEPHANIAH

I. Introduction, 1:1

II. The Day of the Lord against Judah, 1:2-2:3 and 3:1-7

III. Judgment against the Nations, 2,4-15

IV. All Judgments Removed, Kingdom Established, 3:8-20

THE BOOK OF NAHUM

INTRODUCTION

The book of Nahum is a sequel to the book of Jonah. Both have to do with the great city of Nineveh, the famous capital of the Assyrian Empire.

Jonah was sent to Nineveh, about 785 B.C., on a divine mission of mercy and repentance. He preached to the Ninevites in the heyday of their prosperity and power. They repented at his preaching, and restrained themselves, for a time at least, from their wars of conquest and cruelty to other nations.

The book of Nahum, on the contrary, was written in the period of decline and approaching fall of Nineveh and the Assyrian Empire. The prophets Isaiah, Micah, Zephaniah, all had prophesied the fall of Assyria. Nahum came with a prophecy of retribution and doom. His message, shortly before the capital's fall, came like a funeral dirge, as if Nineveh's destruction was already an accomplished fact.

Little is known about Nahum the author. According to the opening statement of the book, his birthplace was Elkosh. But efforts to locate such a place have been unsuccessful. However, there is one bit of interesting etymology: Nahum's name is contained in the latter half of the word Capernaum, which is the Greek spelling for Nahum, and means "village of Nahum." Could it be that Nahum was a resident or founder of Capernaum, which Jesus used as headquarters for most of His ministry?

It is easier to determine the approximate date of the book. Nineveh was captured and destroyed in 612 B.C. In chapter 3:8-10, Nahum describes the destruction of the Egyptian city of Thebes in 663 B.C.. The book of Nahum therefore was written between these two dates. Some say it was most likely written between 621 B.C., the beginning of Josiah's reformation, and 612 B.C., the date of Nineveh's fall.

THE BOOK OF NAHUM - THE CONTENTS

Unlike the books of Isaiah, Micah, and Zephaniah, whose prophecies were devoted largely to Jerusalem and Judah, Nahum's message was directed entirely to a foreign foe, NINEVEH, Judah's arch-enemy for generations. This same enemy destroyed Israel and carried its inhabitants into captivity. Moreover, in the lifetime of Isaiah the Assyrians captured a number of the cities of Judah carrying away more than 200,000 inhabitants. Divine intervention only saved the destruction of Jerusalem itself.

Nahum sounds the death knell of Nineveh, and pronounces judgment, by total destruction, on Assyria. God was just in doing this. Jonah, more than a century before, had brought a message from God, and Nineveh had repented. However the repentance was transitory, and God patiently gave this new generation opportunity to repent (1:3). Assyria had served God's purpose (Isaiah 10:5), and would be destroyed. The destruction of Nineveh according to the details which are given in this written prophecy is almost breathtaking.

This is a message of comfort to a people who live in fear of a powerful and godless nation. God will destroy any godless nation.

Nineveh will fall - this vast city with walls one hundred feet high and wide enough for three chariots to ride abreast, having 1,500 towers of defense - sixty miles around. This impregnable city was destroyed.

Note: (Especially 2:6) - For two years the city resisted the Babylonian and Medes attack, then the river overflowed its banks undermining the foundation of the great wall. Archeologists have proven this precisely.

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF NAHUM

I. Justice and Goodness of God, 1:1-8

II. Justice and Goodness of God Demonstrated in Decision to Destroy Nineveh and to Give the Gospel, 1.9-15

III. Justice and Goodness of God Exhibited in Execution of His decision to Destroy Nineveh, Chapters 2,3

1. Annihilation of Assyria, chapter 2
2. Avenging Action of God Justified, Chapter 3

THE BOOK OF HABAKKUK

INTRODUCTION

Habakkuk means love's embrace. Martin Luther gave a very striking definition of his name, which cannot be improved upon. "Habakkuk signifies an embracer, or one who embraces another, takes him into his arms. He embraces his people, and takes them to his arms, he comforts them and holds them up, as one embraces a weeping child, to quiet him with the assurance that if God wills it shall soon be better."

This is all that is known of the writer, except that he was the doubting Thomas of the Old Testament. He had a question mark for a brain.

The book of Habakkuk was probably written during the reign of Josiah, about the time of the destruction of Nineveh and the rise of Babylon to power. Habakkuk appeared in the twilight, just before the darkness of captivity.

The form and the composition of the book is revealed in the closing statement, "**To the chief singer on my stringed instrument.**" The last chapter is a psalm. The entire prophecy is a gem of beauty. It has been translated into a metric version - the language is classical, full of rare and select turns and words - It is distinguished for its magnificent poetry.

THE BOOK OF HABAKKUK - THE CONTENT

The book opens in gloom and closes in glory. It begins with an interrogation point and closes with an exclamation mark. Habakkuk is a big **WHY?** Why God permits evil is a question that every thoughtful mind has faced. This book is the answer to the question. Will God straighten out the injustice of the world? This book answers the question. Is

God doing anything about the wrongs of the world? This book says that He is. The book is the personal experience of the prophet told in poetry, as Jonah's was told in prose.

Habakkuk is known as the "prophet of faith." The great statement of 2.4, "**The just shall live by faith,**" has been quoted 3 times in the New Testament: Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38.

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF HABAkkUK

I. PERPLEXITY of the prophet, chapter 1

1. First **Problem** of the Prophet, 1,1-4 Why does God permit evil?
2. God's **Answer**, 1:5-11.
God was raising up Chaldeans to punish Judah (v. 6)
3. Second **Problem** of the Prophet(greater than first), 1:12-17
Why would God permit His people to be punished by a nation more wicked than they? Why did He not destroy the Chaldeans?

II. PERSPICUITY (understanding) of the Prophet, chapter 2

1. **Practice** of the Prophet, 2:1
He took the problem to God
2. **Patience** of the Prophet, 2:2,3
He waited for the vision
3. **Pageant** for the Prophet, 2:4
The great divide in humanity: One group, which is crooked, is flowing toward destruction; the other group, by faith, is moving toward God. This is inevitable.
4. **Parable** to the Prophet, 2:5-20
The application is self-evident from the vision. The Chaldeans, in turn, would be destroyed. God was moving among the nations.

III. PLEASURE of the Prophet, chapter 3

1. **Prayer** of the Prophet, 3:1,2
The prophet, who thought God was doing nothing about evil, now asks Him to remember to be merciful. Was he afraid that God was doing too much?
2. **Program** of God, 3:3-15
God rides majestically in His own chariot of salvation, (v.8)
3. **Position** of the Prophet, 3:16-19
He will rejoice (v.18). He has come from pain to pleasure.

THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

INTRODUCTION

Jeremiah was born during the closing days of the reign of King Manasseh (son of good King Hezekiah). He was the son of the priest Hilkiah, he came from a village about four miles from Jerusalem in the southern kingdom of Judah. The nation of Judah had sunk to an all-time low in wickedness. However, about the time of Jeremiah's birth, King Manasseh had experienced a change of heart. It had little effect upon the nation, though. Amon came to the throne while Jeremiah was still a boy and was murdered after reigning for just two years. Then Josiah came to the throne. He was just a boy of eight years of age. Jeremiah was also about eight years old. Josiah grew up to be one of Judah's godly rulers, and reformation and revival took place (2 Chron. 34,35).

Jeremiah, while still very young is called by God to be a prophet. Let us notice three aspects of Jeremiah's call:

1. His election before his birth (vs. 5)
2. His consciousness of his youth (vs. 6)
3. The nature of his commission (vs. 10)

NOTE: He knew from the first that his ministry would demand devotion as well as unction (I John 2:19-20). Furthermore, five years after his call, a very important thing happened in Judah - the finding of the Book of the Law in the temple in Jerusalem (2 Kings 22,23). **NOTE:**

The involvement of his father, Hilkiah, also confirmed Jeremiah's call (2 Tim. 1:5).

The message of Jeremiah was the most unwelcome ever delivered to a people. He was called a traitor because he said that they were to yield to Babylon (38:17-23). Isaiah, almost a century before had said to resist. Why this change? In Jeremiah's day there was only one thing left to do - surrender. In the economy of God, the nation was through, and (15:1) the "Times of the Gentiles" had already begun with Babylon, the head of gold (Daniel 2).

Jeremiah predicted the 70 years captivity in Babylon (25:9-12). However, he saw beyond the darkness to the light, and no prophet spoke so glowing of the future as did he (23:3-8; 30; 31; 33:15-22).

The message of Jeremiah was not only unwelcome, but it was rejected by the nation (26:8-16).

Jeremiah is know as the prophet of doom, yet even though his message was one of gloom and doom for the nation and it's people, he did not appear to be harsh. He was one of the most sensitive souls who ever lived. He prophesied doom with tears and a broken heart. He was a man of intense love, and he revealed the redeeming love of God. His disposition and very demeanor was a striking reflection of the heart of God at that time.

God - rejected, spurned, suffering, proclaiming, yet yearning for Israel with an everlasting love(1 Cor.9:19-22).

NOTE: God's purpose is not always our preference. Jeremiah's commission from God was of such a nature that he was involved in great misunderstanding, persecution and loneliness in the following ways:

- His own neighbors and relatives conspired to kill him (11:21 and 12:6).
- He was denied the comfort of wife and children (16:1,2).
- He was beaten and put in the stocks (20:1-4).
- His writings were spurned and burned by King Jehoiakim (36:1, 21,23).
- He was charged with treason and imprisoned falsely (37:11-15).
- He was again cast into a dungeon and sunk into the dung to be later rescued by King Zedekiah (chapter 31), but remained in prison.
- Finally, he was set free when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem (39:11-12).

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

I. Call of Prophet during reign of Josiah, chapter 1

II. Prophecies to Judah and Jerusalem prior to Zedekiah's reign, chapters 2-20

1. Twofold Condemnation of Judah, chapters 2 - 3:5
2.
 1. Rejected Jehovah
 2. Reared their own Gods
3. Charge of Backsliding during reign of Josiah, chapters 3:6-6
4. Warning delivered in Gate of the Lord's House, chapters 7-10
5. Israel disobeyed God's Covenant made in the Wilderness chapters 11-12
6. Parable in Action - the Linen Girdle, chapter 13
7. Backsliding Nation Judged by drought and famine, chapters 14,15
8. Jeremiah Forbidden to Marry, chapters 16-17:18
9. Message to King in Gate, chapter 17:19-27
10. Sign at Potter's House, chapters 18,19
11. Jeremiah's Persecution. chapters 20

III. Prophecies During the Reign of Zedekiah, Chapters 21-29

1. Answer to Zedekiah re: Nebuchadnezzar, chapters 21,22
2. Bright Light in a Very Dark Day, chapter 23
3. Parable of 2 baskets of figs, chapter 24
4. God spells out 70-Year Captivity, chapter 25
5. Message in Temple Court during reign Jehoiakim, chapter 26
6. Parable of Yokes, chapters 27,28
7. Message of HOPE to 1st delegation of captives, chapter 29

IV. Prophecies re:Future of 12 Tribes and Judah's Near Captivity, Chapters, 30-39

1. Coming Great Tribulation, chapter 30
2. The 'I will' Chapter, chapter 31
3. Jeremiah Imprisoned, buys Real Estate, chapter 32
4. Coming Kingdom as promised to David, chapter 33
5. Zedekiah's Captivity Foretold, chapter 34
6. Rechabites obey God, chapter 35
7. Jehoiakim destroys Word of God, chapter 36
8. Jeremiah Imprisoned, chapter 37,38
9. Judah goes into Captivity, Jeremiah released from prison, chapter 39

V. Prophecies to Remnant left in land after destruction of Jerusalem, Chapters 40-42**VI. Prophecies During Jeremiah's Last Days in Egypt, Chapters 43-51**

1. To Remnant in Egypt, chapters 43-44
2. To Baruch, chapter 45
3. To Egypt, chapter 46
4. To Philistia, chapter 47
5. To Moab, chapter 48
6. To Ammon, Edom, Damascus, Kedar, Hazor, Elam, chapter 49
7. To Babylon, chapters 50,51

VII. Fulfillment of Prophesied Destruction of Jerusalem, Chapter 52

END of Lesson

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