

#26. MINOR PROPHETS - GROUP THREE NAHUM, HABAKKUK, AND ZEPHANIAH

1. Key Themes of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah

- “God will bring low in order to lift up.”
 - **Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah** - continue the message of Judgment, yet they emphasize the Lord’s purpose is the ultimate restoration of His people. The writer of Hebrews tells us that chastisement is a vital element of the Christian Life (Hebrews 12:4-11). Its purpose is to assure our status as sons who are connected to our Father, who is the source of our spiritual life (John 15:1ff). This trio of prophets continues to instill confidence in Yahweh, who is a truly just and merciful God. The enemies of The Lord will be destroyed. Those who belong to Him shall be restored!
- Nahum assures Israel that part of God’s justice involves retribution as well as restoration. The prophet reminds us that God is slow to anger, but His patience is not limitless. Nineveh had been shown incredible mercy through the ministry of Jonah. Apparently the Assyrians returned to their careless ways, and they frustrated the grace of God extended to them. Judgment on Nineveh was as certain as salvation was for Israel.
- Habakkuk is representative of those who had grown weary waiting for the Lord’s vindication of His own honor and people. Like Asaph in Psalm 73, everything he observed told him it was pointless to serve God; evil was prevailing. God promised He would not only work in Habakkuk’s lifetime, but He would eventually purge the whole world of wickedness (1:5; 2:14-20). Habakkuk composed a song of victory based on these promises (3:17, 18), and it reminds us of the victory song of Revelation 15:2-4.
- Zephaniah stood alongside King Josiah to proclaim a pure move of God for Israel. Even if it was only upon The Remnant, God would bring to Himself a people of honor who would be vessels used for God’s Glory. Though the branches be pruned, they will be regrown (Romans 9-11).

2. The Book of Nahum

- **The Author:** Nahum, who may be the namesake for Capernaum (*city or village of Nahum*) of the New Testament. He prophesied during the time of Zephaniah, Habakkuk and Jeremiah

- This book is essentially a sequel to Jonah and was written between 663BC (the date of the fall of Thebes, described in 3:8-10) and the fall of Nineveh, which occurred in 612BC. The destruction of Nineveh is the theme dominating the book of Nahum. The Assyrians were particularly treacherous and were known for the brutality associated with their military campaigns. In 722BC, they conquered the northern kingdom of Israel. Only God's intervention prevented a similar destruction of Jerusalem in 701BC (1 Kings 17-19). The prediction of Nineveh's collapse was as dramatic and incomprehensible as a prediction of the fall of Communist Russia would have seemed in the mid-20th century. Yet God's Word abides, and the powers of this world fall like leaves in autumn. Assyria was at the height of her power, but her precipitous fall would begin in 626BC with the death of Ashurbanipal. By 612BC, proud Assyria would be consumed and replaced by Babylon.

- Nahum means *full of comfort*. It is a shortened form of Nehemiah.

- **Key Verses**
 - "The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble, and He knows those who take refuge in Him. ⁸But with an overflowing flood He will make a complete end of its site, and will pursue His enemies into darkness. ⁹Whatever you devise against the Lord, He will make a complete end of it. Distress will not rise up twice."
Nahum 1:7-9 NASB

- **Key People**
 - **Nineveh** - the capitol city of Assyria that had been spared in the days of Jonah.

 - **Judah** - the southern kingdom, whose Godly remnant harbored hope for Messiah.

- **Key Places**
 - The message of Nahum concerns the kingdoms of Assyria (Nineveh) and Judah (Jerusalem).

- **The Themes of Nahum**
 - **Retribution** - unconfessed sin is a magnet for judgment.

 - **Restoration** - God's love is persistent and restorative when we repent.

- **The Contents of Nahum**

- The destruction of Nineveh is predicted (1:1-15).
- The destruction of Nineveh in detail (2:1-13)
- The destruction of Nineveh assured (3:1-19)
- **Worth Remembering**
 - During this time Judah was somewhat a vassal state to Assyria. Nahum prophesied against Assyria at a time when it was extremely dangerous to do so.
 - The significance of Nahum for us today is the fact that the utter destruction of Nineveh was prophesied when there was no logical reason to assume the empire would fall. Whenever we place our trust in God, our faith may not appear logical or even possible. Yet God knows the end from the beginning, and He can be trusted!
- **When Reading Nahum**
 - Remember Nahum's style is similar to Micah's. We see vivid imagery and descriptive language.

The background of Nahum's day is recorded in 2 Kings 17-23 and 2 Chronicles 33-34.

3. The Book of Habakkuk

- **The Author:** Habakkuk, who may have been involved in Temple worship as a member of the Levitical family (3:19).
 - The date of writing is difficult to determine, but it probably emerged between 620 and 605BC.
 - Habakkuk means *embrace*. The name may mean *to be embraced by God*, or it may mean Habakkuk was to embrace Judah with words of comfort during difficult times. He was a contemporary of Daniel, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and Zephaniah.
 - Under Nabopolassar, who came to power in 626BC, Babylon was emerging as the new world power. His son Nebuchadnezzar waged successful military campaigns against Assyria from 612-605BC on his way to Jerusalem. Judah was about to feel the crush of Babylonian power.

- The Egyptian King Necho allied with Assyria against Josiah of Judah at Megiddo in 609BC. Josiah was killed, leaving his throne to a quick succession of three sons and a grandson (2 Chronicles 35:20-24).
- The message of Habakkuk was to the southern kingdom of Judah. Her legal system had collapsed into injustice and inefficiency. Josiah's reforms were lost as the nation descended into violence and oppressive treatment of its citizens.
- Habakkuk's story follows the path of Asaph's testimony in Psalm 73. We see the prophet's personal journey involving a return from doubt back to faith.
- Chapter 1 begins with the prophet's declaration of despair, but those verses are noticeably different from the affirmation of faith found in the closing verses (3:17-19). We see Habakkuk successfully navigate the waters between doubt and trust. His path of renewal is seen in 2:4, *The Just will live by His faith*.
- **Key Verses**
 - How long, Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, "Violence!" but you do not save? ³Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrongdoing? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds.⁴Therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted. Habakkuk 1:2-4 NASB
 - Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, ¹⁸yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior. Habakkuk 3:17, 18 NASB
- **Key People**
 - Habakkuk - a prophet of Judah, probably a Levite.
 - The people of Judah and Babylon
- **Key Places**
 - Habakkuk's oracle is centered around Judah.
- **The Themes of Habakkuk**

- **Doubt** - all God's children have seasons of spiritual struggle.

- **Hope** - it has been said that man can survive three days without water; three minutes without air; and three seconds without hope. God goes to great lengths to fill our hearts with confident expectation for the future.

- **The Contents of Habakkuk**
 - The Season of The Doubting Mind (1:1- 2:20)
 - The author (1:1)
 - Habakkuk's first complaint (1:2-4)
 - God's first response (1:5-11)
 - Habakkuk's second complaint (1:12-2:1)
 - God's second response (2:2-20)

 - The Season of the Settled Heart (3:1-19)
 - Habakkuk's request for mercy (3:1,2)
 - Habakkuk praise for God's power (3:3-15)
 - God's promise of sufficiency (3:16-19)

- **Worth Remembering**
 - Paul uses Habakkuk's declaration of faith twice to accentuate his teaching on the doctrine of justification by faith (Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11).

 - Habakkuk illustrates that faith is a way life, not just a singular event.

- **When Reading Habakkuk**
 - Remember to read the book as a dialog between the prophet and God over the question of injustice. The structure is clear and the flow is easy to follow.

 - The backstory of Habakkuk is found in 2 Kings 22, 23; 2 Chronicles 34-36.

4. The Book of Zephaniah

- **The Author:** Amos, a shepherd/farmer from Tekoa in Judah, which was about ten miles south of Jerusalem.
 - This book was written in about 755BC, so he was a contemporary of Jonah. Uzziah was king in Judah, and Jeroboam II ruled in Israel. It was about two years before a catastrophic earthquake occurred (1:1; Zechariah 14:5).
 - Interestingly, Amos was a citizen of Judah who was called upon to prophesy to Israel. Due to Nineveh's repentance, tension with Assyria had been minimized, and it was a time of great prosperity in Israel and Judah. Spiritually however, apostasy was becoming more evident in both kingdoms.
 - Amos' name means *burden* or *burden-bearer*.
- **Key Verses**
 - Seek good and not evil, that you may live; And thus may the Lord God of hosts be with you, Just as you have said! ¹⁵Hate evil, love good, and establish justice in the gate! Perhaps the Lord God of hosts May be gracious to the remnant of Joseph. Amos 5:14, 15 NASB
 - Woe to those who are at ease in Zion And to those who *feel* secure in the mountain of Samaria, The distinguished men of the foremost of nations, to whom the house of Israel comes. Amos 6:1 NASB
 - Then Amaziah said to Amos, "Go, you seer, flee away to the land of Judah and there eat bread and there do your prophesying! ¹³But no longer prophesy at Bethel, for it is a sanctuary of the king and a royal residence."¹⁴Then Amos replied to Amaziah, "I am not a prophet, nor am I the son of a prophet; for I am a herdsman and a grower of sycamore figs. ¹⁵But the Lord took me from following the flock and the Lord said to me, 'Go prophesy to My people Israel.' ¹⁶Now hear the word of the Lord: you are saying, 'You shall not prophesy against Israel nor shall you speak against the house of Isaac.' ¹⁷Therefore, thus says the Lord, 'Your wife will become a harlot in the city, your sons and your daughters will fall by the sword, your land will be parceled up by a *measuring* line and you yourself will die upon unclean soil. Moreover, Israel will certainly go from its land into exile. Amos 7:12-17 NASB
- **Key People**
 - Amos - the farmer from Tekoa
 - Amaziah - the wicked priest of Bethel who persecuted Amos

- Jeroboam II - king in Israel
- **Key Places**
 - Bethel and Samaria
- **The Themes of Zephaniah**
 - **Sobriety** - the need to take God seriously.
 - **Responsibility** - we will all answer to God for the way we have lived.
 - **Compassion** - it is a sin to oppress the helpless.
 - **Integrity** - God is looking for people with sincere hearts.
- **The Contents of Zephaniah**
 - God will judge the nations (1:1-2:16).
 - Introduction of Amos (1:1,2)
 - Judgment against Israel's enemies (1:3-2:3)
 - ✓ Damascus (1:3-5)
 - ✓ Gaza (1:6-8)
 - ✓ Tyre (1:9,10)
 - ✓ Edom (1:11,12)
 - ✓ Ammon (1:13-15)
 - ✓ Moab (2:1-3)
 - ✓ Judah (2:4,5)
 - ✓ Israel (2:6-16)
 - Judgment against Judah (2:4, 5)
 - Judgment against Israel (2:6-16)
 - Israel's Specific Sins (3:1-6:14)
 - Irresponsible living (3:1-15)
 - Idolatry (4:1-13)
 - Lack of ethical behavior (5:1-6:14)

- Visions of Judgment and Eventual Restoration (7:1-9:15)
 - The Lord will have mercy (7:1-6).
 - ✓ The Vision of Locusts (7:1-3)
 - ✓ The Vision of Fire (7:4-6)
 - The Lord will no longer have mercy (7:7-9:10).
 - ✓ The Vision of the Plumb Line (7:7-9)
 - ✓ Conflict between Amos and Amaziah (7:10-17)
 - ✓ Vision of the Fruit Basket (8:1-14)
 - ✓ The Vision of the Altar (9:1-10)
 - The Lord will restore Israel (9:11-15).

- **Worth Remembering**
 - Remember that Zephaniah may have been a member of the royal family through Hezekiah.

 - Remember that God's promise of restoration is directed toward the remnant of faithful Jews.

- **When Reading Zephaniah**
 - Remember he is a contemporary of Hosea.

 - God used his background as a farmer and shepherd to illustrate God's heart for Israel.