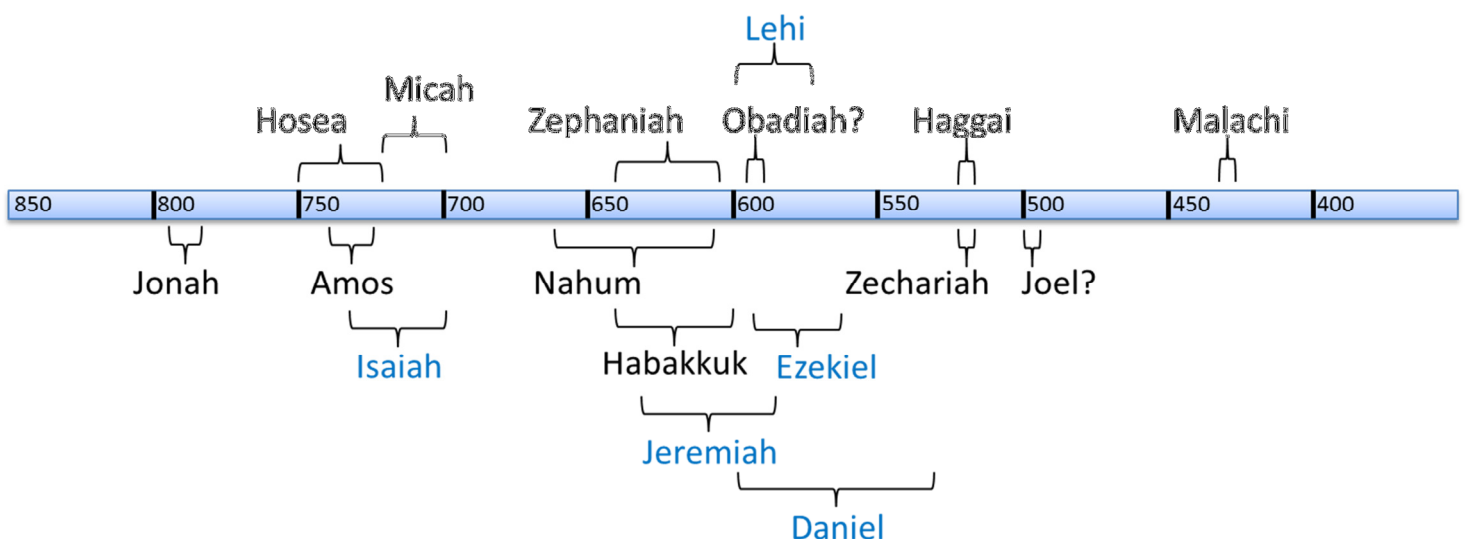

JONAH, MICAH, NAHUM, HABAKKUK, AND ZEPHANIAH

Lesson 35, Old Testament, Adult Religion Class, Tuesday, 15 May 2012

Study Guide

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INTRODUCTION



None of the books in this lesson are long; Micah is the most lengthy at seven chapters, while the others have either three or four chapters. But all give were

prophets of note with important messages for their days and lessons for ours.

JONAH

Jonah's four short chapters recount the story of a prophet called not to Israel or Judah but to Nineveh. He was from a town in the Galilee called Gath-hepher, not far from Nazareth (2 Kings 14:25) in the northern kingdom of Israel. His name means 'dove' and his father's name, Amittai, means 'my truth.' As 2 Kings shows, he was a prophet during the time of Jeroboam II, though we don't know specifically when his mission to Nineveh took place. Jonah is a type of Israel, chosen by the Lord, called to be his witnesses to the world, but who rebelled against God's will. Even so, he was preserved until he could fulfill his mission.

Jonah's story is told in the third person, though the intimate details recounted speak to his involvement in at least the initial telling. This makes his book is different from the other prophets—we know little of Jonah's teachings but much of his learning.

The question is asked about the historicity of Jonah's story. The tie to 2 Kings 14:25 demonstrates he was a real prophet, but some scholars point out that there is no historical record of Nineveh ever converting to the Lord or of any prophet of YHWH going there outside of this book. However, a close study of Assyrian history during this time (about 790-760 BC) shows that it was experiencing a period

of weakness and inner turmoil between the great kings Shalmaneser III (859-824 BC) and Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 BC). Nineveh was not the capital city at this time. Local leaders there had great autonomy and would surely be concerned about the potential of destruction with a weak central government. Israel, where Jonah lived, was actually a

more potent kingdom at this time. In other words, Jonah was being sent to not to the capital but to an important city of a weakened empire that was no real threat to his country at that time. The historicity of his story is further strengthened by three New Testament citations (Matthew 12:39-41; 16:4; Luke 11:29-30).

OUTLINE

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|--|--------------------|-------------------|--|
| 1) Running Away (1)
a) Call and flight (1:1-3)
b) On the ship (1:4-17) | 2) In the Fish (2) | 3) At Nineveh (3) | 4) Questions (4)
a) Jonah's response (4:1-4)
b) The Lord's response (4:5-11) |
|--|--------------------|-------------------|--|

RUNNING AWAY (1)

Jonah thought he could escape God's call to serve by ignoring it and heading off in the opposite direction. Instead, he had to learn that YHWH is the universal God with power over all things, including creatures that live unseen in the depths of the sea.

opposite direction so that they couldn't possibly get the message (or so he thought).

1:3 **went down to Joppa**. Joppa, just south of modern-day Tel Aviv, was one of three ancient port cities in Israel's territory. It was here that Peter was when he had the vision that started the preaching of the gospel to the first Gentiles (Acts 10). It has been noted that Jonah goes down several times at first—down to Joppa, down into the ship, down into the hold, then down into the fish. By the Lord's blessing, he does come up again to complete his mission.

CALL AND FLIGHT (1:1-3)

1:2 **go to Nineveh**. Other prophets had been told to speak against nations beyond Israel's borders; some like Daniel and Ezekiel had even gone to live among them. Thus Jonah's call was not entirely unique, though it is the only recorded instance of a prophet being called to go to an Assyrian to call them to repentance. As mentioned above, Nineveh was not the capital of the Assyrian empire at this time, nor was the empire the great world power it was before and after Jonah's time. But they were still Israel's enemy and the call would be something like an American missionary being sent to teach the people of Iran today.

1:3 **flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord**. Jonah initially succumbed to the Near Eastern thought that YHWH was just a local God and if he went far enough away, he could ignore the call. But why would Jonah run to Tarshish—probably a port city in modern Spain—to try and escape this call? The fear of Assyrian punishment could certainly have been a factor. But it becomes clear later in the book that Jonah simply didn't believe the Assyrians should be given the chance to repent. He fled in the

ON THE SHIP (1:4-17)

1:4 **The Lord sent out a great wind**. Jonah's misunderstanding about the Lord's 'reach' is shattered in the fourth verse; YHWH has the power to send wind all the way out into the sea and command the great creatures who live there.

1:5 **he lay, and was fast asleep**. When Jesus and his disciples were in the midst of the storm, the Savior was asleep (Mark 4:36-41), as was Jonah on this case. But they slept for different reasons—Jesus because he was the calm in the midst of the storm, Jonah because he was in a 'deep sleep' (as the Hebrew reads), possibly even a trance-like state which made him oblivious to all that was happening. He would only wake up in time to see the consequences of his choice on himself and those on the ship with him.

1:6 **call upon thy God.** Everyone on the ship was busy praying to their own gods (1:5) but nothing had improved, so the captain asked Jonah to try his as well. In the ancient world, many prayed to multiple gods (what the New Testament will later call “vain repetitions” in Matthew 6:7), asking for the same thing from each one because they never knew which god would actually pay attention to them. Thus this does not indicate any belief on the captain’s part in Jonah’s god, but it does show an ardent desire to be thorough.

1:7 **cast lots.** Casting lots was a form of divining a god’s will in the ancient world. Here the crew didn’t appear to have any specific god in mind, since they worshipped so many, but the Lord controlled the outcome so it pointed to Jonah.

1:9 **the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land.** Confronted by the evidence, Jonah acknowledged God’s authority over all creation, including the sea on which they were laboring.

1:12 **cast me forth into the sea.** The men did not tell Jonah to repent but simply asked what they could do to appease the Lord. Jonah suggested that throwing him into the water was the mostly likely step.

1:14 **We beseech thee, O Lord.** The sailors did not suddenly convert, but Jonah’s guilt and God were understood, so they all appealed to YHWH that the storm might relent without doing Jonah harm. After Jonah was tossed overboard, they made some kind of sacrifice (not a burnt one, obviously, under the conditions but perhaps a food or wine offering) and “made vows” (1:16), promising greater gifts for the blessing of the storm abating.

1:17 **a great fish.** The text never says ‘whale,’ but that is a common phrase concerning Jonah. While there are no whales native to the Mediterranean Sea, there is no reason something that large couldn’t be brought there by God to serve this purpose. The fish, whatever it was, somehow swallowed Jonah without biting him.

1:17 **three days and three nights.** The Savior cited this aspect of Jonah’s story as a sign of his own death and resurrection (Matthew 12:39-40). Three days was the amount of time it took to declare someone officially dead, a prudent position since it wasn’t always clear if someone was truly dead or not.

IN THE FISH (2)

2:1 **Jonah prayed.** In the ship’s hold, Jonah was asleep, ignoring God. Now in the fish’s stomach, he prayed mightily, offering a beautiful and poetic prayer.

2:2 **out of the belly of hell.** Sheol (“hell”) was the place spirits went after death. Jonah feels like he has died in the belly of the fish, so calls it Sheol.

2:4 **I am cast out of thy sight.** This means to be “banished from your sight” (NIV and NASB). Because of his sins, Jonah realizes that he is not worthy to even be within the Lord’s view.

2:4 **yet I will look again toward thy holy temple.** Jonah declares that even while he is banished from the Lord’s view, yet he (Jonah) will turn and look again at the temple, the house of the Lord on earth, the symbol of his presence. This shows Jonah’s great hope of ultimately enjoying God’s forgiveness. It is also interesting coming from a prophet of the north,

which kingdom built alternate places of worship. Jonah did not buy into those false temples but looked toward the Lord’s house in Jerusalem. This reference to the temple as the dwelling place of the Lord is repeated in verse 7.

2:7 **my prayer came in unto thee.** When Jonah “remembered the Lord,” it made all the difference. His prayer reached the Lord in the temple, just as the prayers of the people reached the Lord each day through the altar of incense in the Holy Place.

2:8 **lying vanities.** This comment appears to be self-reflective; Jonah’s sin was a vanity that caused him to lie to God, to others, and to himself.

2:9 **I will pay that that I have vowed.** Like the men on the ship, Jonah likely promised some kind of gift to the Lord in exchange for his being released from the fish. The verse (in poetic parallel structure) indicates that the gift was a sacrifice at the temple.

2:9 **Salvation is of the Lord.** The Hebrew says *yěšû‘ātāh la-ywāh*, meaning ‘Salvation belongs to YHWH.’ For Jonah, this is a statement of grace immediately following his own declaration of faithfulness and obedience.

2:10 **it vomited out Jonah.** What a disgusting and difficult experience that must have been! The acids in the fish’s intestinal tract alone would have eaten the skin off Jonah’s body after three days. Then to be forcefully regurgitated and suddenly pitched up onto the land must have been an overwhelming feeling.

AT NINEVEH (3)

3:1 **the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time.** There is no sense from the text about the length of time between the two calls in chapter 1 and here. After Jonah left the fish on the beach, was it months of recovery and prayer until this call, or did it happen even as he lay on the beach? Regardless, the key message is that Jonah got a second chance to fulfill his mission, and this time, he did as he was asked.

3:3 **great city of three days’ journey.** Situated on the east side of the Tigris River, near modern Mosul in what is today northern Iraq, Nineveh was known for its size and large population. The ruins of the city today cover more than 1700 acres, surrounded anciently by a wall 7.5 miles in length.

3:4 **Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.** This is all the preaching Nineveh gets from Jonah—at least all that is recorded.

3:5 **believed God.** From Jonah’s brief encounter, many believed his words and turned to the Lord. It’s

not clear how deep their conversion was or if was just an acceptance of YHWH was one more god in their pantheon, but the repentance and sorrow was clearly enough for the Lord to have mercy on them.

3:6 **the king of Nineveh.** The king was involved in the city’s response, calling for everyone—including animals—to wear sackcloth and fast and “turn every one from his evil way” (3:8).

3:9 **if God will turn and repent.** Other translations capture the better meaning of this verse, such as, “Who knows, God may turn and relent” (NASB). The JST changes verses 9 and 10 (the only ones changed in Jonah) so that the people are repenting and God is forgiving: “Who can tell ~~if God we will turn and~~ **turn unto God, but he will** turn away from **us** his fierce anger, that we perish not? And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God ~~repented of~~ **turned away** the evil, that he had said ~~that he would do unto~~ **bring upon them; and he did it not.**”

QUESTIONS (4)

Had the book of Jonah ended there, the story would have been quite satisfactory. But Jonah had not yet learned the full lesson that the Lord intended him to learn from his assignment.

JONAH’S RESPONSE (4:1-4)

4:1 **he was very angry.** Jonah was upset that the Lord would have mercy on the Ninevites. Perhaps he was also upset that without a destruction, his prophecy did not come to pass. Whatever the reason, Jonah was clearly more focused on himself than the people he had just brought to repentance.

4:2 **gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.** These statements about the nature of God are not always what some people think is the Old Testament portrayal of the Lord, yet they are the true picture of God when the entire OT is taken into account. Other similar statements include Exodus 34:6; Nehemiah 9:17; Psalm 86:15; and Joel 2:13. But Jonah is not saying this in a complimentary way but rather as his justification for running away and not preaching to Nineveh in the first place!

Note that Joseph Smith did not correct this instance of God repenting, but the Hebrew is the same—he

'relents' or 'turns away' from his previous declaration because of his mercy and kindness.

4:3 **better for me to die than to live.** Jonah is over-the-top upset by this. What missionary has ever experience success but then wanted to die because of it?

4:4 **Does thou well to be angry?** A more modern way of expressing this might be, 'So, is this working for you?' Jonah's self-pity and anger against God are getting him nowhere; the only person being affected in any way is Jonah himself.

THE LORD'S RESPONSE (4:5-11)

4:5 **sat on the east side of the city.** Jonah could have been just outside the city on the east, but to get a good view of things, he could go about six miles east to Mt Alfaf or Mt Mar Daniel, where he would have had a commanding view of the entire city.

4:6 **glad of the gourd.** Jonah made a "booth" (the same word used with Feast of the Tabernacles), a little hut or shelter made with branches, to give him some shelter from the sun. To further help him, the Lord caused a "gourd" to grow over him as well. It's not known what kind of plant it was, but from the context it was a vine-like plant with large leaves that helped provide extra shade. But the next day, a worm attacked the plant and it withered and died (4:7).

4:8 **a vehement east wind.** This is more proverbial than literal. In Israel, the east wind blew out of the desert and was indeed "vehement" or "scorching" (NASB and NIV). But in Nineveh, the east came from the mountains and usually brought rain. Whatever the direction, Jonah's reaction to the increased heat was to again with that he would die.

4:9 **Doest thou well to be angry.** The Lord repeats the question from verse 4: 'How is this working for you, Jonah?' Jonah stubbornly replied that it was right for him to be angry because the plant had withered up and died because it had made his life worse.

4:11 **should I not spare Nineveh.** Jonah was upset because the plant, which he had done nothing for, had died, but he had no pity for the people that God was trying to save, even he had (at least a little) labored for them.

4:11 **cannot discern.** The Lord especially had mercy on those who could not, metaphorically, tell one hand from the other, meaning they did not truly comprehend the evil they were involved in and so the mercy they were being extended was especially appropriate given their humble response. Jonah's final lesson was that just as the Lord gave him a second chance after he sinned, so Jonah should be willing to rejoice in others getting the same second chance.

MICAH

Micah's name means 'who is like YHWH.' He was from Moresheth, a town about 25 miles southeast of Jerusalem, not far from the Philistine city of Gath. His book says he was a prophet in the days of three kings, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, making him a contemporary with Isaiah (one of them is quoting the other in Micah 4:1-3 and Isaiah 2:2-4; it's not clear which is the author and which the quoter). He spoke to the people of Judah, but his message was primarily about the destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel, headquartered at Samaria, which occurred during his ministry (721 BC). Using legal terminology, Micah condemned the sins of the

people, promised their punishment, but offered hope for a future restoration.

Though short, Micah's structure reflects a book written in several stages over a long period of time and then compiled together from those multiple sources. It includes judgment speeches, laments, legal terms, prayers, and metaphors.

Other quotations of Micah include: Jeremiah 26:18 quoting 3:12, which is used to save Jeremiah's life; Matthew 2:6 quoting 5:2 about the birthplace of the Messiah; and Matthew 10:35 quoting 7:6 when Jesus commissioned his disciples.

OUTLINE

- 1) Judgment (1-3)
 - a) Sins of Samaria and Judah (1)
 - b) Woes (2:1-5)
 - c) False prophets (2:6-11)
 - d) Deliverance (2:12-13)
 - e) Speaking to leaders (3)
- 2) Future Deliverance (4-5)
 - a) A vision (4:1-5)
 - b) Promised restoration (4:6 – 5:15)
- 3) Laments and Promises (6-7)
 - a) Reproof (6)
 - b) Lament (7:1-7)
 - c) Trust of victory (7:8-20)

JUDGMENT (1-3)

Micah boldly stood before kings, princes, priests, and prophets, declaring all of their sins. He faced opposition from false prophets, but he stood firm in the conviction that could only come through the power of the Spirit of the Lord, and promised destruction to the wicked and blessings to the righteous.

SINS OF SAMARIA AND JUDAH (1)

1:1 **Micah the Morasthite**. Moresheth is probably modern Tell Judeideh, as identified by early Christians in the holy land and excavations at the site that match this time period.

1:3 **the Lord cometh forth out of his place**. The Lord was pictured as dwelling in a heavenly temple above the firmament. Thus he “will come down, and tread upon the high places of the earth.”

1:4 **mountains shall be moulten**. Micah’s imagery is eschatological—focused on the Second Coming. But his words also convey the power of the Lord over the earth; his mere coming can melt mountains and break apart valleys.

1:6 **make Samaria as an heap**. Samaria was abandoned for many years and was a mound of dirt covering the former palaces and homes that were there before the Assyrian capture of the people.

1:8 **I will go stripped and naked**. Micah’s symbolism has a double meaning. It represents great mourning, the tearing or removing of normal clothing. But it also represents exile and slavery, where captive prisoners were stripped naked and driven to far away lands.

1:9 **her wound is incurable**. Similar language is used by Jeremiah (15:18) and Job (34:6).

1:10 **Gath, weep**. As the footnote says, each of the cities in verses 10-16 have something declared about them that is a play on the name of the city, though the Hebrew is a bit obscure on some of them: Gath (winepress) = weep (wine running down); Aphrah (dust) = roll in the dust; Saphir (fair) = naked shame; Zaanan (those who come out) = don’t escape or come out; Bethzel (standing place) = no support or can’t stand; Maroth (bitter) = waiting for good; Lachish (invincible) = transgressions found; Moresheth-gath (possession of Gath, Micah’s home town) = presents; Achzib (deceit) = lie; Mareshah (crest of a hill) = bring a conqueror (coming over the hill); Adullam (justice of the people) = the glory of Israel.

1:16 **enlarge thy baldness as the eagle**. While we have “bald eagles” in our country, they clearly have feathers. But the Hebrew word for “eagle” here can also mean a vulture, which do indeed have bald heads and are thus a symbol for death and mourning.

WOES (2:1-5)

2:1 **work evil upon their beds**. This refers to their plotting evil deeds at night, then doing them the next day (“when the morning is light, they practice it”).

2:2 **they covet fields, and take them by violence**. This is an allusion to Ahab and Jezebel, who killed a man to get his field next to their palace (1 Kings 21).

FALSE PROPHETS (2:6-11)

2:6 **Prophecy ye not.** Micah has to confront other prophets with different voices, who no doubt prophesied peace, prosperity, and triumph over their enemies, as the king and others wanted to hear. Micah's words call out sin and call to repentance and therefore he calls on the false prophets to be silent.

2:7 **do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly?** Nephi echoed a similar sentiment when he told his brothers that "the guilty taketh the truth to be hard" but if they were "righteous and were willing to hearken to the truth," they would feel differently (1 Nephi 16:2-3).

2:11 **he shall even be the prophet of this people.** Micah declared that because of the sins of the people, anyone who said what the people want to hear got the job of prophet.

DELIVERANCE (2:12-13)

2:12 **I will surely gather the remnant.** Micah briefly turned to a promise that counters the claims of the false prophets; though he has prophesied destruction and scattering, yet the Lord will gather back a portion of Israel as a herd of lost sheep.

SPEAKING TO LEADERS (3)

3:1 **O heads of Jacob, and ye princes of the house of Israel.** Both the northern and southern kingdoms'

leaders stand condemned by Micah, because they do not seek for justice.

3:3 **eat the flesh of my people.** The leaders symbolically eat the people alive with their thievery, taxes, and deceptions.

3:4 **he will not hear them.** When the bad times come, these wicked leaders will cry to the Lord for help, but he will not hear them and will even hide from them.

3:6 **night shall be unto you.** The leaders and false prophets will experience a period of complete darkness, cut off from the true word of the Lord. It will be as if the sun went down on their lives and their words and left them ashamed and confounded.

3:8 **I am full of power by the spirit of the Lord.** Micah declared the truth of his authority and power—it comes from the Spirit of the Lord which is in him. That is how you can tell the difference between a true and false prophet.

3:11 **judge for reward.** The leaders took bribes to sway their judgment, the priests taught what those who paid them wanted to hear, and the prophets told you the will of the gods in exchange for money. All of these claimed the protection of the Lord because they were in the city with his temple (Jerusalem). But Micah promised that the city "shall become heaps" (3:12), nothing but a forest on a hill.

FUTURE DELIVERANCE (4-5)

In these chapters, Micah turned his attention through prophetic vision to the future restoration of the remnant of scattered Israel that would be gathered and returned. He spoke of the Lord's power and peace in those days after the Messiah comes, and how he will cleanse the world from sin and wickedness.

A VISION (4:1-5)

4:1 **But in the last days.** Shifting gears, Micah speaks of events at the end of time. Here he was either quoting Isaiah 2:1-3 or Isaiah was quoting him—no way to know which one. But the fact that both share these verses is very telling regarding the significance

of the message, captured well in verse 2: "he will teach us of his ways, and we will talk in his paths."

4:5 **every one in the name of his god.** Micah's image of the world after the coming of the Lord represents a universal peace ("none shall make them afraid," 4:4) but also a universal tolerance. It will not be mandatory to believe in YHWH to be part of the latter-day kingdom.

PROMISED RESTORATION (4:6 - 5:15)

4:10 **thou shalt go even to Babylon.** Returning to his own day, Micah declares that the Jews will be taken to Babylon but will one day be redeemed from their enemies.

4:12 **they know not the thoughts of the Lord.** The nations that conquer Jerusalem or see it happen will claim that this proved the Lord is weak and defeated, but Micah declared that it was all part of the Lord's will, which they do not understand because they cannot know his thoughts and plans for Israel.

5:2 **But thou, Beth-lehem Ephratah.** In the context, this clearly states that Messiah or "ruler in Israel" will come from this town. When the wise men asked Herod where the new king of the Jews would be born, his scribes quoted this scripture that it would happen at Bethlehem (Matthew 2:1-8). The term "Ephratah" means 'to bear fruit' or 'to branch off' and had reference to a clan in Bethlehem, which is small among the "thousands of Judah" but is the line that will bring forth the Messiah.

5:4 **he shall stand and feed in the strength of the Lord.** This is an interesting reference when the two incidents of Jesus miraculously feeding thousands are remembered (Matthew 14:15-21; 15:32-38).

5:8 **shall be among the Gentiles.** When the Savior visited the Nephites, he quoted 5:8-9, applying it directly to his audience: "Then shall ye, who are a remnant of the house of Jacob, go forth among them" (3 Nephi 20:16-17).

5:15 **I will execute vengeance.** The Lord spoke through Micah how he would tear down the wicked—their horses and chariots, their cities and strongholds, their witchcrafts and soothsayers, and their idols and false worship (5:10-14).

LAMENTS AND PROMISES (6-7)

REPROOF (6)

6:2 **the Lord's controversy.** Like Hosea 4, the Lord here made a legal case against Israel and Judah; he is claiming to have a legal dispute over their violation of covenant, while proving that he has done nothing to merit such neglect.

6:3 **what have I done unto thee?** He demands all the evidence that the people can muster against him of unfair treatment or burdensome demands. They have none. Then he offers them examples of some of the things he has done to keep his side of the agreement, such as bringing them out of bondage in Egypt (6:4) and preserving them in the journey and the early days of the conquest of the land (6:5).

6:6 **calves of a year old.** Levitical sacrifice law saw this as the ideal burnt offering. Other numbers represent great sacrifices, whether in quantity or quality. But these are not what the Lord is looking for. Rather, he wants men to "do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly" (6:8).

6:16 **the statutes of Omri are kept.** The decrees of wicked Omri and his son Ahab, who built Samaria and made it their capital, are depicted as the beginning of the wickedness that the people are still living.

LAMENT (7:1-7)

7:2 **there is none upright among them.** These verses describe the wickedness of the day, when no one can be trusted and when even families members lie and cheat each other.

7:7 **I will look unto the Lord.** Patiently and with great faith, Micah looked to the Lord to care for him, to keep him safe in an insane world, to be his salvation.

TRUST OF VICTORY (7:8-20)

7:8 **the Lord shall be a light unto me.** Reminiscent of John 8:12, where Jesus declared that he was the "light of the world," and that those that follow him "shall have the light of life."

7:9 **until he plead my cause.** Micah recognized that he and others have sinned and merit some punishment by the Lord. But in the same breath, he declares that the Lord will "plead my cause, and execute judgment [justice] for me." The Lord strikes the perfect balance with justice and mercy.

7:14 **Feed thy people with thy rod.** A reference to the Lord being the good shepherd (John 10:11-14) and to the poetry of Psalm 23 where the Lord is our shepherd.

7:18 **Who is a God like unto thee.** This is a play on Micah's name and begins a marvelous closing doxology where Micah lays out powerful and

marvelous attributes of God—forgiving, merciful, compassionate, casts away sins, and acts according to the truth.

NAHUM

Nahum's name means 'comfort.' It is similar name to the place in south Arabia where Lehi's party buried Ishmael (see 1 Nephi 16:34). It is a short form of Nehemiah ('comfort of Jehovah'). Nahum's book is about the destruction of Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, which was achieved in 612 BC. Between that and the mention of the fall of No-Amon (Thebes) as

an historical event (occurred 663 BC), Nahum's book can be dated to the middle of the seventh century BC, perhaps during the reign of Hezekiah's son, Manasseh. He is called "the Elkoshite" (1:1) but that location is unknown, thus shedding no light on his home town.

OUTLINE

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1) Destruction of Nineveh (1)
a) By the Lord's power (1:1-8)
b) Israel saved from oppression (1:9-15) | 2) Details of Nineveh's Destruction (2)
3) Justification for Destruction (3) |
|---|---|

DESTRUCTION OF NINEVEH (1)

Nahum began by contrasting the destructive power of the Lord with his complete righteousness. That is how he can be both "furious" (1:2) and "slow to anger" (1:3); indignant, fierce, and furious (1:6) but also "good" and "a strong hold in the day of trouble" (1:7).

with other God. Therefore, he is justified being avenging and wrathful ("revenge, and is furious").

1:3 slow to anger, and great in power. Happily, those two traits are both present fully in the Lord. If he were great in power but prone to anger, the universe would be a very different place.

BY THE LORD'S POWER (1:1-8)

1:1 The burden of Nineveh. Though not explained in the footnote here, a good cross reference is Isaiah 13:1 where "burden" is explained to be "a message of doom." The word means 'a load borne' or 'a lifting,' symbolizing both what the prophet bears (the sad message) and the people to whom the burden is given having to carry it. In Nahum's case, the load he bears is the message of the destruction of Nineveh, representing the kingdom of Assyria.

1:7 he knoweth them that trust in him. Compare Matthew 7:23 where the Lord declares that he never knew the workers of iniquity.

ISRAEL SAVED FROM OPPRESSION (1:9-15)

1:1 the vision of Nahum. The prophet's message came to him in a vision, though no other details about the receipt of the vision are shared.

1:9 he will make an utter end. Not one to leave things unfinished, Nahum assures his listeners that the wickedness they can see around them will end and never return in the last days.

1:2 God is jealous. In many cases in the Old Testament, the word "jealous" is better translated 'zealous.' Not in this verse. Like a covenant husband, the Lord is jealous of Israel's adultery or idolatry

1:13 I will break his yoke from off thee. The Lord's promise is that he will free Judah from the oppression of the Assyrian empire, under which they suffered for many years.

1:15 the feet of him that bringeth good tidings. This verse echoes Isaiah 52:7 which Nahum would have read coming into his calling just as Isaiah was completing his mission.

DETAILS OF NINEVEH'S DESTRUCTION (2)

2:2 **marred their vine branches.** The invading Assyrian army devastated the crops as they laid siege to a city including destroying their grape crop used for wine, the main drink.

2:3 **valiant men are in scarlet.** This could be a reference to the natural color of the Assyrian army uniforms or to the amount of blood spilt in their many battles, staining their shields and clothing.

2:5 **the defence shall be prepared.** Nineveh will have things in readiness against the attack of the Babylonians, though there is a sense of panic in their efforts ("they shall make haste"). But they were not afraid of a siege because of the great walls and size of the city.

2:6 **The gates of the rivers shall be opened.** Nineveh was breached when the Tigris River (or more precisely, the Khosr River) was raised by destroying dams to a level so high that it tore down

part of the walls, allowing the enemy soldiers entry into the city.

2:7 **Huzzab.** In the past, this was thought to be the name of a queen, but recent scholarship has determined the better translation is 'fixed' or 'determined.' Thus the verse reads: "It is decreed that the city be exiled and carried away" (NIV).

2:9 **the spoil of silver.** Assyrian cities were plundered, stripped of their great wealth. Babylonian records chronicle large amounts of plunder after conquering the cities and palaces of their rival.

2:10 **faces of them all gather blackness.** Their faces are full of depression and gloom.

2:11 **the dwelling of the lions.** Like Judah, other kings used the lion as their symbol. Nahum asks where is their dwelling place now that it all is destroyed?

JUSTIFICATION FOR DESTRUCTION (3)

3:1 **Woe to the bloody city!** Chapter 3 catalogs the justification for the Lord's destruction—lies, robbery, murder, immorality, witchcrafts, and more.

3:8 **Art thou better than populous No.** No or No-amon was a city of ancient Egypt, today better known as Thebes--modern Karnak and Luxor. The Assyrian army attacked and plundered it in 663 BC, helping to date Nahum's reference to this event.

3:12 **fall into the mouth of the eater.** Assyria will be like ripe figs, easily shaken from the branch and eaten by passers-by.

3:19 **no healing of thy bruise.** The wound that will be afflicted on the city is fatal.

HABAKKUK

Habakkuk's name appears to be an Akkadian name of a plant. Nothing is known about him personally. Probably ministering just before Jerusalem's destruction, alongside Jeremiah, Zephaniah, Lehi, Daniel, and Ezekiel, Habakkuk was first troubled that the Lord would use the evil Babylonians to punish

Judah. The Lord's first answer that the Babylonians would also be judged did not relieve his troubled feelings. Through a back-and-forth conversation, the prophet finally understood the majesty of God and because of his ultimate power, we can have faith in him.

OUTLINE

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1) Habakkuk: Wickedness prevails (1:1-4) | 3) Habakkuk: Why use the wicked? (1:12 – 2:1) |
| 2) The Lord: The Chaldeans will Punish Judah (1:5-11) | 4) The Lord: Woes to the Wicked (2:2-20) |
| | 5) Habakkuk: Prayer and Song (3) |

HABAKKUK: WICKEDNESS PREVAILS (1:1-4)

1:2 ***O Lord, how long shall I cry.*** Habakkuk doesn't ask why the Lord brings punishment on his people but he does ask "how long" it will last. Likewise

Joseph Smith asked, "How long shall thy hand be stayed . . . how long shall they suffer these wrongs" (D&C 121:2-3).

THE LORD: THE CHALDEANS WILL PUNISH JUDAH (1:5-11)

1:5 ***I will work a work.*** The Lord speaks to Habakkuk, assuring him that an amazing thing will happen, something he could not imagine would happen, even if told ahead of time. Paul quoted this verse as applying to the message he carried about Christ at the end of his first speech (Acts 13:41).

1:6 ***I raise up the Chaldeans.*** The work mentioned in verse 5 is that the Chaldeans (Babylonians) will conquer many other nations. This is amazing because for more than 100 years, Assyria had been the dominant world power and Babylon a vassal state of Nineveh.

HABAKKUK: WHY USE THE WICKED? (1:12 – 2:1)

1:13 ***the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?*** Habakkuk is troubled that the Lord would use the wicked nation of Babylon to chastise the far more righteous people of Judah. He is not oblivious to Judah's sins, but compared to Babylon, they are clearly the more obedient.

2:1 ***watch to see what he will say.*** The prophet determines to stay his course as a watchman on the tower and wait to see how the Lord responds to this quandary.

THE LORD: WOES TO THE WICKED (2:2-20)

2:2 ***make it plain upon tables.*** Similar to Ezekiel's "sticks" (Ezekiel 37:16), Habakkuk wrote on wooden tablets probably filled with wax or some other temporary substance.

2:6 ***Woe to him that increaseth that which is not his!*** Referring to the Babylonians, the Lord laid out their wickedness as well, which includes taking things that belong to others.

2:8 ***the remnant of the people shall spoil thee.*** Babylon made enemies out of everyone with the plundering and attacks. So when those left from conquest have the first opportunity, they will turn around and spoil the Babylonians back. There is no loyalty among the oppressed.

2:14 ***the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord.*** A great promise for the last days when nearly everyone on the planet will know not just who the Lord is but his glory, meaning they have witnessed and experienced his power, his Spirit, and his Atonement.

2:18 ***What profiteth the graven image.*** The Lord invites those who worship idols to get an answer from them, to learn anything, or even get a breath from them. In contrast, the Lord is in his temple in all his glory, such that the whole world is silent waiting for his decree.

HABAKKUK: PRAYER AND SONG (3)

Chapter 3 is a poem, a shift from the prophetic declarations of chapters 1 and 2. It includes directions to the singers and/or players of instruments (Shigionoth and Selah, for example). It is also somewhat apocalyptic in nature, pulling in images that are familiar from other prophets with apocalyptic styles.

3:2 *I have heard thy speech, and was afraid.*

Habakkuk still had questions for the Lord but was afraid to approach him and ask. He asked for mercy as he made his petition.

3:3 *God came from Teman, and the Holy One from mount Paran.* This poetic parallelism is designed to represent the Lord as coming from the east and makes reference to the eastern lands the children of Israel passed through on their way from Mount Sinai to the Promised Land. Teman was associated with Edom and thus Esau, while Paran is part of Ishmael's lands anciently.

3:4 *his brightness was as the light.* The Lord is often portrayed as light and brightness, greater than the sun at midday (Joseph Smith-History 1:16).

3:4 *horns coming out of his hand.* Horns symbolize power and authority; coming from his hands means he holds that power under his control.

3:5 *pestilence, and burning coals.* More symbols of the Lord's power over the earth and the elements.

3:7 *the tents of Cushan.* Habakkuk saw the Lord moving in his power from his location in the desert

(Mount Sinai?) toward the Babylonians, causing the lands of Cushan and Midian to tremble because of his greatness.

3:9 *Thy bow was made quite naked.* Sounding odd in the KJV, it means that the Lord showed his weapon, a bow, and he called for arrows ("the oaths of the tribes").

3:10 *the deep . . . listen up his hands.* The waters of the earth worship the Lord.

3:11 *sun and moon stood still.* This reflects back to Joshua 10 where the Lord made the celestial bodies hold still so the Israelites could complete their battle.

3:15 *Thou didst walk through the sea with thine horses.* Another allusion to two ancient historical events—the Exodus and the crossing into the Promised Land (Exodus 14 and Joshua 3).

3:16 *I trembled in myself.* Having this vision of the greatness of the Lord caused Habakkuk to be weak and even sick, and he had to go rest and recover.

3:17 *fig . . . vines . . . meat . . . flocks.* Even if all that is needed to sustain life were to fail, Habakkuk determines that he would yet "rejoice in the Lord" and "joy in the God of my salvation" (3:18).

3:19 *The Lord God is my strength.* God provides strength to us individually and as a people. He will make us able to move quickly and with certainty and get to the top, like a deer or gazelle or mountain goat.

ZEPHANIAH

Zephaniah's name means 'YHWH treasured' or 'YHWH hid.' He was perhaps of royal lineage, the great-great-grandson of Hezekiah (spelled Hizkiah in 1:1, but the same name in Hebrew). Prophesying early in the reign of Josiah (1:1), Zephaniah left a message of divine judgment but also redemption, with a focus on "the day of the Lord" (1:7). Interestingly, the first Biblical commentary written

by a Latter-day Saint was on this book, penned by Oliver Cowdery in 1834.

Zephaniah spoke judgment against Judah during the days of the great king, Josiah (640-609 BC). As a royal 'cousin' of the king, he could have enjoyed a respected position in court, as did Isaiah with Hezekiah, and perhaps was instrumental in Josiah's reforms that began in 628 BC and seem to post-date

this book. He was a contemporary with Jeremiah, though could have been much older than that

prophet, finishing his ministry just as Jeremiah begun.

OUTLINE

1) Judgment on Judah (1:1 – 2:3)

2) Judgment on Israel's neighbors (2:4-15)

3) Judgment on Jerusalem (3:1-7)

4) Deliverance for Nations and Zion (3:8-20)

JUDGMENT ON JUDAH (1:1 – 2:3)

1:2 ***I will utterly consume all things.*** Zephaniah's message is one of complete destruction if there is no repentance.

1:4 ***the name of the Chemarims with the priests.*** "Chemarims" refers to pagan priests who worshipped other gods.

1:5 ***swear by Malcham.*** Or, Molech, a Ammonite god to who some Israelites offered children for sacrifices.

1:7 ***the day of the Lord is at hand.*** In our day, we see that phrase as referring to the Second Coming, and in most Old Testament contexts, that is still correct. But in some cases, the prophets also used it to refer to a more short-term judgment that was coming, as in this case. Zephaniah is speaking of a day when the Lord will call Judah to account for her sins. It is still, however, a type of the destruction that will come in the last days.

1:10 ***howling from the second.*** The Hebrew is *mishneh*, meaning 'double' or 'second,' probably the area west of the older city that Hezekiah enclosed during his expansion of Jerusalem.

1:11 ***inhabitants of Maktesh.*** "Maktesh" means 'deep hollow,' probably the Tyropean Valley between the old and new parts of the city.

1:12 ***The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil.*** These people believed that the Lord had nothing to do with their lives, as do many in our day. They went about living in complacency, happy when things went well and unhappy when not. Neither circumstance caused them to consider God's hand in all things.

1:15 ***a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress.*** Zephaniah uses gloomy adjectives to describe what will happen at the day of judgment. Even though the trumpet of warning will be blown (1:16), people will walk as if blind, still living in their sins (1:17).

2:1 ***O nation not desired.*** Or, "O shameful nation."

2:3 ***Seek ye the Lord.*** After declaring all the coming disasters, Zephaniah still held out some hope for those who seek to know the Lord.

2:3 ***ye shall be hid.*** To be "hid" in the day of the Lord is to be safe from the judgments.

JUDGMENT ON ISRAEL'S NEIGHBORS (2:4-15)

2:4 ***Gaza . . . Ashkelon.*** Verses 4-7 call for judgment on the Philistine cities to the west of Judah.

2:8 ***Moab . . . Ammon.*** Next the prophet spoke on the nations to the east of Judah, though verse 11.

2:12 ***Ethiopians.*** Or, Cushites, the southern part of Egypt.

2:13 ***Assyria.*** Finally, Zephaniah turns to the nation that destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel. In Zephaniah's day, Assyrian was still the dominant world power.

JUDGMENT ON JERUSALEM (3:1-7)

3:1 **the oppressing city.** Zephaniah calls Jerusalem “filthy and polluted,” referring to the worship of foreign gods.

3:4 **Her prophets are light and treacherous.** The false prophets who appeased the wicked leadership of Manasseh and Amon were really reckless with their counsel and treacherous with their plotting.

3:4 **done violence to the law.** The “law” is torah, the Law of Moses given by God to his people. They have done violence to it by perverting and ignoring it.

3:6 **I made their streets waste.** Jerusalem survived the Assyrian attack but many other cities in Judah were laid waste and destroyed in the campaigns during the days of Hezekiah. The Lord allowed this to try and humble Judah and bring her back to him, but it was in vain.

DELIVERANCE FOR NATIONS AND ZION (3:8-20)

3:8 **assemble the kingdoms.** Zephaniah used the present situation of the pending destruction of Jerusalem to speak of the future day when all nations would be gathered together to war, similar to Joel 3.

3:9 **a pure language.** Many have seen in this unique verse an allusion to all people speaking a single language after the Second Coming, perhaps the language of Adam or God himself.

3:11 **no more be haughty.** At that day, the proud shall be humbled, and the humble and poor will trust in the Lord (3:12).

3:13 **none shall make them afraid.** Under the Lord’s protection, Zion shall be a place of peace and safety.

3:14 **Sing . . . shout . . . be glad and rejoice.** Singing is linked to shouting for joy and rejoicing (also verse 17).

3:15 **the king of Israel.** The true King is “in the midst of thee”; YHWH will be eternally with his people.

3:17 **is mighty; he will save.** The Lord is all powerful and salvation is his very name.

3:19 **I will undo all that afflict thee.** All wrongs will be righted, all evil put away, all unfairness rectified, all sin redeemed.

3:20 **I will make you a name and a praise.** “I will give you honor and praise” (NIV). All the world will know that the Lord is God and that his covenant people are saved, protected, defended, and redeemed by him.

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