



LESSON 21

EXPLANATION OF THE PROPHETS

Israel	Judah
Jeroboam I 931–910	Rehoboam 931–913
Nadab 910–909	Abijah 913–911
Baasha 909–886	Asa 911–870
Elah 886–885	
Zimri 885	
Omri 885–874	
Ahab 874–853	Jehoshaphat 873–848
Ahaziah 853–852	
Joram 852–841	Jehoram 848–841
Jehu 841–814	Ahaziah 841
	Athaliah 841–835
Jehoahaz I 814–798	Joash 835–796
Jehoash 798–782	Amaziah 796–767
Jeroboam II 793–753	Uzziah 792–740
Zechariah 753	
Shallum 752	
Menahem 752–742	Jotham 750–731
Pekahiah 742–740	
Pekah 752–732	Ahaz 735–715
Hoshea 732–722	Hezekiah 729–686
	Manasseh 696–642
	Amon 642–640
	Josiah 640–609
	Jehoahaz 609
	Jehoiakim 608–598
	Jehoiachin 598–597
	Zedekiah 597–586

The Scripture says of Josiah that “before him there was no king like him who turned to the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might...” (2Kings 23.25). However, the Scripture continues, “the Lord did not turn from the fierceness of His great wrath with which His anger burned against Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked Him” (2Kings 23.26; see 2Kings 21.10-15). To better understand not only why God’s people were going into captivity, but also how the Lord was using the nations, we need to examine the explanations the Lord gave through three of his prophets: Nahum, Zephaniah and Habbakuk.

Explanation 1: What Would Happen To Assyria? (Nahum)

The opening phrase of Nahum’s prophecy sets the stage for the book’s message: “The oracle of Nineveh.” This message from Jehovah would focus on Nineveh, the capital city of the Assyrian Empire. In our study we’ve noted how numerous Assyrian rulers were involved in the affairs of Israel and Judah:

» Shalmaneser III (858-824 BC) fought a coalition of kings including Ahab. Later, he would receive tribute from Jehu.

- » Adadnirari III (810-783 BC) was the “deliverer” the Lord sent to deliver Jehoahaz (see 2Kings 13.1-7).
- » Tiglath-pileser III (744-727 BC) invaded Israel during the reign of Menahem and exacted heavy tribute (see 2Kings 15.19-20) and took much of Israel’s territory during the reign of Pekah (2Kings 15.29). When Hoshea deposed Pekah in 732 BC, he was a vassal to the Assyrian king.

- » Shalmaneser V (727-722 BC) invaded and laid siege to Samaria, carrying Israel away into captivity (2Kings 17.3ff).
- » Sennacherib (705-681 BC) invaded Judah in the days of Hezekiah, but the Lord demonstrated His awesome might in delivering His city (see 2Kings 18.13-19.36).
- » Esarhaddon (681-669 BC) and Ashurbanipal (669-627 BC) continued to exert dominance over Judah during the days of Manasseh and would extend Assyrian might into Egypt, conquering Thebes in 664 BC.

While no kings of Judah are mentioned in Nahum, a likely date would be toward the end of Manasseh's reign. The date would have been after the fall of Thebes in 664 BC (Nahum 3.8), but before the fall of Nineveh in 612. The name "Nahum" means "comfort" and is significant to the theme of the letter. God's people could take comfort that their Assyrian oppressors would be destroyed. But for the Assyrians there would be no comfort (Nahum 3.7).

The Message of Nahum:

Hymn Describing Yahweh (1.2-11)

- » The hymn glorifies and praises the Lord for His attributes, focusing on His power and judgment.
- » His power which controls the forces of nature (vss. 3-6) would be felt by His enemies, namely Nineveh (vss.1,11).

Oracle of Two Verdicts (1.12-2.2)

- » Even though the Lord had used the Assyrians to afflict His people (1.12; cf. Isaiah 10.5-11), they would afflict His people no longer.
- » Judah could look forward to peace and blessings, but the Assyrians and their gods would be completely cut off (1.14).

Increased Confrontation (2.3-13)

- » This passage describes an attack (vss. 3-4) and even though there is a hurried defense (vs. 5), it would be ineffective (vss. 6-8). The city would be left open and defenseless (vss. 9-10).
- » Nineveh's former ferocity is now a source of mockery (vss. 11-12).
- » Even though it would be the Babylonians who would defeat the Assyrians, the Lord makes it clear that He is the reason they will fall. "I am against you..." (vs. 13).

"Woe, Bloody City" (3.1-7)

- » "Bloody city" was an apt description for Nineveh given her many atrocities (vss. 1-4).
- » But since the Lord was against them (vs. 5) she would be devastated and brought to shame.

A Satire Against Might (3.8-13)

- » Nahum was probably penned at the height of Assyrian power, shortly after the defeat of Thebes (No-amon, see 3.8).
- » No one at that time would have thought Assyria could fall, but they would because the Lord had declared it!

Useless Preparations (3.14-19)

- » Assyria might have boasted in her numerous merchants and guards, but they would be of no avail. She would be devastated like locusts consume vegetation.
- » Ultimately, nothing could prevent Assyria's fall. Her wound was incurable.

Major Themes:

1. The Lord is faithful. Nahum uses the name "Yahweh" (Lord) 13 times in the letter. This was His covenant name and emphasized that He would remain faithful to His people and destroy His enemies (see 1.7-8).
2. He is Lord of ALL the earth. The Lord had used the Assyrians to punish His people, but now He would punish the Assyrians (1.12-13). He would do this because He is Lord over all people!
3. Thus, His people have hope. When Nahum wrote his prophecy, Assyria was completely dominant. But God's people could believe in a better future because their Lord had promised it (see 1.15-2.2).

Explanation 2: What Would Happen To God's People? (Zephaniah)

The prophet Zephaniah was another great-grandson of Hezekiah and prophesied during the reign of his cousin Josiah (see Zephaniah 1.1). It seems likely that Zephaniah's prophecies occurred shortly after the Law was found and were intended to aid Josiah's reforms. It's clear from the text that the people had not yet given up their idols (Zephaniah 1.5), yet the Lord was still offering the people hope if they would repent (Zephaniah 2.1-3). Furthermore, Zephaniah uses numerous quotations from Deuteronomy indicating that the Law had been found and would have been familiar to the people:

- Zeph 1.13; Deut 28.30.
- Zeph 1.13; Deut. 28.39.
- Zeph 1.15; Deut 28.53,55,57.
- Zeph 1.15; Deut 4.11.
- Zeph 1.17; Deut 28.29.
- Zeph 1.18; Deut 32.21-22.
- Zeph 3.5; Deut 32.4.
- Zeph 3.17; Deut 28.63; 30.9.
- Zeph 3.19-20; Deut 26.19.

The Message of Zephaniah: the Day of the Lord

The day of judgment (1.2-3.8)

- » God's judgment on the world (1.2-3) and on Judah and Jerusalem (1.4-6).
- » The day of the Lord announced (1.7).
- » Judgments on that day against God's people (1.8-13) and on the world (1.14-18).
- » How the people should respond (2.1-3).
- » Judgments on the nations (2.4-15) and on Jerusalem (3.1-7).

The day of hope (3.8-20)

- » His people called to "wait" for the Lord (3.8)
- » Return of His people (3.9-10)
- » Restoration of a sinful people (3.11-13)
- » Rejoicing of a saved people (3.14-20)

Lessons Regarding the Day of the Lord

1. Two sides of the Day: In Zephaniah's prophecy the Day of the Lord is both a day of punishment (1.8-9, 14-18) and a day of blessing (3.11, 16-17). The New Testament refers to the day in the same way, as a day of destruction (2Peter 3.10) and a day of promise (2Peter 3.13). Furthermore, Zephaniah shows how both aspects of the Day are related, i.e. God's judgments on that day are necessary so that God's remnant can be blessed (see Zephaniah 3.8, 19-20). We would do well to remember this when we question God's judgment on this world: His judgment MUST happen if we are to truly be saved.
2. The Day is near: Zephaniah declared that the Day when God would judge Jerusalem was near (1.7,14) even though it still be several years before God destroyed the city and Temple. But the Day is emphasized as being near so that the wicked might repent (1.12) and so that the righteous might be comforted (3.8). The New Testament emphasizes the nearness of that day for the same reasons (see 2Peter 3.10)
3. Preparations can be made: That is the message of Zephaniah 2.1-3. The Day is coming, but if the people would turn and seek the Lord they look forward to that Day, rather than dread His approach. We are encouraged to do the same (see 2Peter 3.14-15).

Explanation 3: How Would God Use Babylon? (Habbakuk)

For centuries the Babylonians and Assyrians had striven for mastery of Mesopotamia... and the entire ancient near east. For much of the divided kingdom period Assyria had been the dominant power, but the Lord declared to Hezekiah that it was the Babylonians who would take his treasures and even his sons

into captivity (2Kings 20.17-18). Habakkuk's prophecy occurred at a time when Babylon's power had grown, and the day when they would afflict God's people was drawing near.

The Message of Habakkuk:

Habakkuk's first complaint and the Lord's response (1.1-11)

- » Habakkuk complains that the Lord had not yet judged the iniquity of His people (1.1-4)
- » The Lord replies that He would soon bring the Chaldeans (i.e. Babylonians) in judgment against His people (1.5-11)

Habakkuk's second complaint and the Lord's response (1.12-2.20)

- » Habakkuk complains that the Lord was using a people more wicked than the Jews to punish them (1.12-17)
- » Habakkuk waits for the Lord's reply (2.1)
- » The Lord's reply: the proud will perish, but the righteous will live by faith (2.2-20)

Habakkuk's prayer of faith (chapter 3)

- » Habakkuk approaches in reverence (3.1-2)
- » Habakkuk remembers how the Lord delivered His people in the past (3.3-15)
- » Habakkuk pledges to rejoice in the Lord no matter what hardships may come (3.16-19)

Lessons from Habakkuk:

1. The righteous have always lived by faith (2.4). This passage is well known primarily for its use in Romans 1.17. God's point to Habakkuk was that His true people would have life, true life, if they maintained faith in Him. Paul uses the passage to show that God's people have always been those who placed their faith in Him.
2. Faith will endure trial (3.16-19). The book closes with stirring words. Habakkuk knew that difficult days were coming, days of distress and famine. Yet, he would continue to rejoice in the Lord knowing He would provide strength and salvation. Habakkuk would live by his faith.