

Old Testament Survey
Lesson 30 – Micah, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah
 Valley Bible Church Adult Sunday School
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Review of the Prophets

We have studied all of the Major Prophets in relation to their historical context. We continued our survey of the writing prophets by looking at the pre-exilic Minor Prophets to Israel (Hosea, Joel, and Amos). Next we looked at the pre-exilic Minor Prophets who prophesied to foreign nations (Obadiah, Jonah, and Nahum). Today we continue with the remaining pre-exilic Minor Prophets from Judah.

Old Testament (39)							
History (17)			Poetry (5)	Prophecy (17)			
				Major (5)		Minor (12)	
<i>Pentateuch</i> (5)	<i>Pre-Exilic</i> (9)	<i>Post-Exilic</i> (3)		<i>Pre-Exilic</i> (2)	<i>Exilic</i> (3)	<i>Pre-Exilic</i> (9)	Post-Exilic (3)
<i>Genesis</i>	<i>Joshua</i>	<i>Ezra</i>	<i>Job</i>	<i>Isaiah</i>	<i>Lamentations</i>	<i>Hosea</i>	Haggai
<i>Exodus</i>	<i>Judges</i>	<i>Nehemiah</i>	<i>Psalms</i>	<i>Jeremiah</i>	<i>Ezekiel</i>	<i>Joel</i>	Zechariah
<i>Leviticus</i>	<i>Ruth</i>	<i>Esther</i>	<i>Proverbs</i>		<i>Daniel</i>	<i>Amos</i>	Malachi
<i>Numbers</i>	<i>1 Samuel</i>		<i>Ecclesiastes</i>			<i>Obadiah</i>	
<i>Deuteronomy</i>	<i>2 Samuel</i>		<i>Song of Sol</i>			<i>Jonah</i>	
	<i>1 Kings</i>					Micah	
	<i>2 Kings</i>					<i>Nahum</i>	
	<i>1 Chron</i>					Habakkuk	
	<i>2 Chron</i>					Zephaniah	

*Italicized books have already been studied; bolded books will be studied today

- ca. 840 *Obadiah to Edom*
- 835-796 *Joel to Israel and Judah*
- ca. 775 *Jonah to Ninevah*
- ca. 760 *Amos to Israel*
- 755-710 *Hosea to Israel*
- 740-680 *Isaiah*
- 740-686 Micah to Judah**
- 722 Israel Falls to Assyria
- ca. 650 *Nahum to Ninevah*
- 635-610 Zephaniah to Judah**
- 627-561 *Jeremiah*
- ca. 609 Habakkuk to Judah**
- 605 Exile Stage #1 Daniel and a few taken captive to Babylon
- 605 *Lamentations*
- 605-536 *Daniel*
- 597 Exile Stage #2 10,000 Jews taken captive to Babylon
- 593-570 *Ezekiel*
- 586 Exile: Stage #3 Destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem)
- 539 Babylon falls to the Medo-Persians (Daniel 5)
- 538 Return: Stage #1 50,000 Jews return under Zerubbabel & Joshua
- ca. 520 *Zechariah (Post-exile)*
- 520-518 *Haggai (Post-exile)*
- 516 Completion of 2nd Temple
- 458 Return: Stage #2 2,000 Jews return under Ezra to restore worship
- 445 Return: Stage #3 Nehemiah returns to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem
- 433-424 *Malachi (Post-exile)*

The Book of Micah

Micah's prophecies were directed toward the two capital cities of the Hebrew people, Samaria in Israel, and Jerusalem, in Judah. He lived to see many of his predictions come to pass. Micah's writing style makes him a favorite among the minor-prophets. He writes much like a tough but sensitive war correspondent who reports about the horror and hope of the current crisis. Through the impending judgment, Micah saw the clear and coming glory of a permanent redemption in Israel.

Micah is a fairly common name in Scripture and derives from the same root word as Michael, which means "Who is like YHWH?" This particular Micah is identified as a Moresthite (v1) who came from Moresheth-gath (v14) about 25 miles southwest of Jerusalem, near the border of Philistia. A great description of him comes from his own pen, "...I am filled with power--With the Spirit of the LORD--And with justice and courage To make known to Jacob his rebellious act, Even to Israel his sin." (3:8).

Micah (736-700 BC) was a younger contemporary with Isaiah and prophesied, "*in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, ...*" (v1) [750-686 BC]. King Jotham, basically a good king, did not remove the "high places" from the kingdom, setting it up for the very evil King Ahaz to ally with Assyria, while watching them take the northern tribes captive. After Ahaz, Hezekiah, one of Judah's best kings, was anti-Assyrian and witnessed the siege of Jerusalem which Sennacherib led in 701 BC and God's angel thwarted (2 Kings 18-19).

The affect of Isaiah on Micah's ministry is obvious, and his prophecy has been called "a miniature Isaiah" by several writers. His writing served to warn Israel of the impending fall of Samaria, but he also helped bring hope and spiritual awakening in the south during the days of Hezekiah (Jer 26). When Samaria fell, thousands of refugees fled to Judah, bringing their mixed religion, including the worship of Baal. This situation reached its zenith under King Ahaz. Micah addressed this problem, but primarily attacked the personal and social sins of the nation.

Assyria became so dominant, as it captured Israel and ran raids into Judah, that Micah's predictions that Babylon, a mere vassal state of Assyria, would conquer Judah seemed ludicrous. Micah, in Judah, was much like Amos, in Israel--a voice crying a warning into ears that were largely deaf. The major difference between Micah and Isaiah was their audience. Isaiah was a scholar among the upper class in Jerusalem, with access to King Hezekiah. Micah, on the other hand, was a man of the fields and spoke directly to the general populous. For the peasants and villagers, this was a time of harassment from Assyrian armies, exploitation by the wealthy land owners and false prophets, and oppression by their own rulers. Micah's indictments of social injustice and religious corruption echo the messages of Amos and Hosea in the north and Isaiah in the south.

Micah is one of the most quoted prophets, including references in Isaiah 2:2-4 and 41:15, Ezekiel 22:27, Zephaniah 3:19, Matthew 2:5, Matthew 10:35 and 36, and John 7:42. It looks like he died in peace according to Jeremiah 26.

The book has three parts, each beginning with a call to hear and containing a message to Samaria, Israel and Jerusalem, Judah. They are a portent of immanent judgment and prediction of future blessing, both of which are part of God's plan for His chosen people.

I. Retribution (Chapters 1-3)

The first three chapters echo the judgment themes of Amos. These punishments are justified because of the sins of Israel and Judah (v5-6). There are three messages directed to three specific groups:

A. Message to Cities (1)

First, Micah uses references to prostitution to describe the idol worship, much as Hosea did (v7). He continued by describing a devastating end for Samaria (v6), but also spoke of the calamity "coming to the gate of Jerusalem."

B. Message to People (2)

The second prophecy sounds more like Amos, as Micah details the sins of the people and their refusal to listen to God's prophets. The people preferred to listen to false prophets under the influence of alcohol rather than Micah, who was under the influence of the Holy Spirit (v11). The ultimate solution will only be seen when the Lord Himself acts, sending the Messiah to remove all obstacles and deliver His remnant into the kingdom (v12-13).

C. Message to Leaders (3)

"Hear now, heads of Jacob and rulers of Israel. Is it not for you to know justice?" (v1) Thus begins a series of stinging rebukes aimed at the corrupt political leaders and money-loving prophets. He ends with a description of the destruction of Jerusalem, *"Zion will be a plowed field, Jerusalem will become a heap of ruins, and the temple will become high places of a forest."* (v12).

II. Restoration (Chapters 4-5)

Chapters 4 and 5 present God's plan for Israel and Judah that look beyond the current disasters to a day of reconciliation.

A. Coming Kingdom (4)

Micah 4:1-4 presents a beautiful picture (parallel to Isaiah 2:1-4) of the restored temple on Zion to which people of many nations would come to hear God's word and learn His ways in a time of peace. We know, by its description in verses 1-8, that this is not referring to the rebuilding of the temple under Ezra and Nehemiah, but in the Millennial Kingdom. Verses 9 and 10 refer to the Babylonian captivity and the return to Judah by decree of Persian King Cyrus which, seeing the historical situation, was an amazing prophecy. Note, there is no king, since they will never be a true monarchy again until the Messiah reigns. Then Micah switched again to the end times, Armageddon and the final defeat of Israel's enemies, *leading to the ...*

B. Coming King (5)

He will come, first, from Bethlehem, the birth place of King David, born to the virgin (Isa 7:14), but his people will still be scattered (v2-3). All this fury and opposition will end with the coming of the ultimate Shepherd, *"In the strength of the Lord, and in the majesty of the name of the Lord His God."* (v4). Then Micah describes, again, the glories of the Millennial Kingdom, with King Jesus, who is greater than the Shepherd, King David, on the throne and shepherding His people. Israel will be safe from their enemies (v5-6), strong as a lion (v7-9), and purified from idolatry forever (v10-15).

III. Repentance (Chapters 6-7)

The third part of Micah begins as the others did, with the command, *"Hear!"* and presents a courtroom drama with God as the plaintiff, Israel the defendant, and Micah as His prosecuting attorney.

A. Pleading (6)

The prosecutor states God's case: (v3-5)

1. He rescued Israel from Egypt
2. He gave them capable leaders, Moses, Aaron, and Miriam
3. He reversed the intended curse of Balaam (Num 23-24)
4. He brought them to the promised land

And still they disobeyed Him and broke the covenant

Israel proposes a settlement: (v6-7) [A plea bargain]

Payment for their sin by sacrifices.

The prosecutor responds to their offer: (v8)

God's position was clearly stated in Deut 10:12 and is twofold:

¹²"Now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require from you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, Deut 10:12

1. He prefers obedience (spiritual heart commitment) above sacrifice (worship).
2. He requires them to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly.

The prosecutor brings God's second indictment intermingled with judgment: (v9-16):

1. They have been criminals in business (v10-11)
2. They were full of violence and deceit (v12)
3. They were vile (v 14)
4. They were as evil as those in the days of Omri and Ahab, wicked idolaters and apostates (v16)

B. Pardoning (7)

1. Israel (through Micah) throws herself on the mercy of the court. She confessed her sin, acknowledged God's justice (v1-9)
2. God's final verdict. Judgment is coming in spite of past and future blessings. He will restore their kingdom (Millennium) (v10-13). He will bless her (v14-15). He will exalt her over other nations (v16-17).
3. God will forgive (v18-19).

¹⁸Who is a God like You, who pardons iniquity And passes over the rebellious act of the remnant of His possession? He does not retain His anger forever, Because He delights in unchanging love. ¹⁹He will again have compassion on us; He will tread our iniquities under foot Yes, You will cast all their sins Into the depths of the sea. Micah 7:18-19

4. God's promises to Israel will be fulfilled! (v20).

²⁰You will give truth to Jacob And unchanging love to Abraham, Which You swore to our forefathers From the days of old. Micah 7:20

The Book of Habakkuk

Habakkuk prophesied during the final days of the Assyrian Empire and into the time of Babylonian rule under kings Nabopolassar and his son Nebuchadnezzar. The Babylonian armies moved north and west to overthrow Nineveh in 612 BC and chased its leaders, first to Haran and then on the Carchemish, capturing those cities by 606 BC. In the midst of this (in 609 BC) Josiah, who had brought great spiritual reform to Judah, was killed in a battle against the fleeing Assyrian King and his ally, King Necho from Egypt, at Megiddo. His three sons and a grandson quickly led the people of Judah back into idolatry which was recorded like this, *"your eyes and your heart are intent only upon your own dishonest gain, and on shedding innocent blood and on practicing oppression and extortion."* (Jer 22)

Habakkuk fits well coming directly after Nahum. Nahum examines the judgments of the Lord on Assyria and Habakkuk studies those brought against the Chaldeans or Babylonians. Both these judgments are results of their violence and cruelty against His chosen people. Habakkuk was a questioning prophet. *Why does God permit evil? Why would God permit His people to be punished by a nation more wicked than they? Why did He not destroy the Chaldeans?*. This book answers these questions by showing that God is working and, like Obadiah, reminds us that God ultimately settles all accounts.

I. The Prophet's Problem (Chapters 1 and 2)

A. Question #1: Why does God permit evil? (1:2-4)

Habakkuk looks around and sees violence (v2), injustice and strife and conflict (v3), the law paralyzed and justice perverted (v4). Not in the pagan world, but in Judah! Habakkuk is crying out, but from his point of view, God is not listening.

Answer #1: God does not permit, He punishes! (1:5-11)

God does not allow wickedness and disobedience, even among His own chosen people, but how He plans to deal with it is surprising: God's answer is a shock, and He knows it ...

⁵"Look among the nations! Observe! Be astonished! Wonder! Because I am doing something in your days--You would not believe if you were told. ⁶"For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans, That fierce and impetuous people... Hab 1:5-6

Then He describes just how horrible they were. The Chaldeans were a Semitic people who were the dominant force in the Babylonian empire, and so synonymous with Babylon.

B. Question #2: Why does God use evil people? (1:12-2:1)

OK, God had to punish sin, even among His own people. Judah had to be disciplined, but when Habakkuk looked at the Babylonians, he saw a people far worse than they ever were. How could God punish a nation for unrighteousness by using a nation that was even less righteous? Verse 13, *"Thine eyes are too pure to approve evil, and thou canst not look on wickedness with favor... Why art Thou silent when wicked swallow up those more righteous than they?"*

Answer #2: God uses, but also punished evil people! (2:2-20)

Yes, God will use the wicked to punish his adulterous nation. He has done it before and He will do it again. The principle never changes and is stated in verse 4, *"Behold, as for the proud one, his soul is not right within him; But the righteous will live by his faith."* Who will come out of this time of testing and discipline. The proud Chaldean soul, or Judean soul for that matter, will not survive this testing. But, the person who is in right relationship to God will live *"by his faith."* The formula for survival in hard times is always having faith in God and being faithful to God. God follows this principle with a description of five specific "woes" which will come upon the Babylonians. He states that they will come to ruin and sums up why in verses 19 and 20

If there is any one event we can point to in the history of the church which has had a profound effect on its direction it would be when Martin Luther was reading his Latin Bible and came to Rom 1:17, *For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."* The sudden, shocking realization that salvation came by faith, apart from anything man could do showed the lie of "works" as a means to attain salvation.

Interestingly, when Paul wrote Rom 1:17, he was quoting the Prophet Habakkuk when he said in 2:4, *"Behold, as for the proud one, His soul is not right within him; but the righteous will live by his faith."* Faith is believing that God is in control even when we do not see or understand, or even agree with what He is doing.

¹Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. ²For by it the men of old gained approval. Heb 11:1-2

³For what does the Scripture say? "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS." Rom 4:3 (and Gen 15:6; Rom 4:9, 22; Gal 3:6)

This righteous is living by faith when he believes that God is in control and is faithful, and will keep His covenant promises even when His people reject Him and He seems to have abandoned them.

II. The Prophet's Prayer (Chapter 3)

Chapter 3 is Habakkuk's prayer Psalm which came to be used in worship as indicated in the musical superscription *"For the choir director, on my stringed instruments."*

A. Petition (3:1-2)

Habakkuk yields to God's judgment. He is satisfied that God knows best whether he understands what is going on or not. Hear him in verse 2, *"O Lord, revive Thy work . . ."* He is saying literally, "Lord, make alive your covenant work. Fulfill your plan in judgment and in mercy." He trusts God to be God and do what is right and just.

B. Praise (3:3-15)

The praise portion of this prayer song is a portrayal of God's salvation of his people from the land of Egypt (Exodus 1-15). He sees that God's overarching plan and purpose in everything He has done is to save His people and bring them to Himself.

C. Promise (3:16-19)

Habakkuk in faith believes God is in control and will *"wait or rest quietly"* even as the invasion comes. Knowing that this time of disaster is just a small part of God's plan, he can *"exult in the Lord, . . . rejoice in the God of my salvation."* Because that same *"Lord God is his strength."* (v18-19)

¹⁸Yet I will exult in the LORD, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation. ¹⁹The Lord GOD is my strength, And He has made my feet like hinds' feet, And makes me walk on my high places.
Hab 3:18-19

By faith we believe that God is on the throne, in control, and able to bring about His complete plan for us, even as we often have to quietly, patiently wait in the midst of trials.

The Book of Zephaniah

Zephaniah was different from most other prophets. He was a noble prince, from the royal house of Judah, a great-great grandson of King Hezekiah. He stood up during the reign of Josiah (641-609 BC) and spoke of the wickedness of his own aristocracy probably before Josiah's reforms were in place. The name Zephaniah means "hidden, or protected, by Jehovah."

Nahum had prophesied fifty years earlier, but two wicked kings, Manasseh and Amon, lead an idol worshiping people and brought unspeakable evil back to Judah. On top of the immorality, the rich nobility had amassed great fortunes by taking advantage of and enslaving their own people. Josiah became king when he was still a young boy and promoted religious and moral revival. He personally led the priests in repairing the temple and hacking down images and idols. Zephaniah was his voice of God before and in the midst of this revival.

Zephaniah's prophecies were pronouncements of wrath. "The great Day of the Lord" was coming. He looked squarely at the coming invasion of Babylon but also predicts:

1. A faithful remnant will be delivered from that captivity.
2. Even some heathen people will be converted.
3. Worship of God will eventually happen not only in Jerusalem but everywhere else as well. (The Millennial Kingdom.)

I. Prophetic Judgment (Chapters 1:2-3:8)

The book opens with a word of prophesy of total destruction for the entire earth. In the original Hebrew this could be read as destruction to the entire land of Canaan or destruction effecting of the entire world. Verse three leads us to believe it refers to the second, the final judgment during the Tribulation years.

A. Judging Judah and Jerusalem (1:2-18)

God narrows His message down to His people in Judea and Jerusalem, indicting them for their idolatry.

Zephaniah calls for silence before the Lord, as God punishes the arrogant princes and aristocracy for leading the people into idolatry. There will be no defense heard, only an awed silence as they witness the devastation of their land. This will include: panic in the cities and plunder of their wealth (v10-13) and the end of the population and life as they have known it (v14-18).

The group to be cut off is specific:

⁴"So I will stretch out My hand against Judah And against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem And I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place, And the names of the idolatrous priests along with the priests. ⁵"And those who bow down on the housetops to the host of heaven, And those who bow down and swear to the LORD and yet swear by Milcom, ⁶And those who have turned back from following the LORD, And those who have not sought the LORD or inquired of Him."
Zeph 1:4-6

B. Judging Other Nations (2:1-3:8)

Chapter 2 visits the Lord's judgment on other nations that have dared to come against "the Lord and His anointed."

1. Gentiles (2:4-15)

God used the pagan nations to punish His people, but they themselves would not go unpunished either. God is just. He chose one nation from each direction to illustrate.

- 1) West – Philistia (v4-7) – Its major cities of Gaza, Ashkelon, Ekron, and Ashdod are to be destroyed so completely that "Judah will pasture on it." (v7)
- 2) East – Moab and Ammon (v8-11) – The decedents of Lot through his incest would come to ruin and complete desolation just like Sodom and Gomorrah, especially harsh punishment because of their taunting of Judah.
- 3) South – Ethiopia (v12) – They will be, "slain by My sword." God's sword in this case was Nebuchadnezzar's conquest of Egypt reported in Ezekiel 30.
- 4) North – Assyria (v13-15) – Of course Nineveh fell and the nation was conquered by Babylon shortly after this prophesy.

2. Jerusalem (3:1-7)

Chapter 3 starts, "Woe, or curse, to her who is rebellious and defiled, The tyrannical city!" Jerusalem, the "Holy City of God," the "City of David," has become utterly defiled, insensitive to God's calls for repentance through His prophets. A description of its decadence and its disobedience can be found in Jeremiah 5:1; 19:5; 23:13-14; 32:35. They lack faith, righteousness, relationship, compassion, and humility as they follow arrogant and wicked rulers, prophets, and priests (v1-5). In verses 6 and 7 Zephaniah sites the destruction of other wicked nations, hoping his people will see the connection, hear, and accept correction.

3. All others (3:8)

The prophecy moves from the immediate invasion of Judah to the future "Day of the Lord," including great tribulation and the gathering of all nations to judgment.

II. Prophetic Joy (Chapter 3:9-20)

Behind the judging of nations, both His own and their enemies, God has greater plans, which include great blessing and restoration for His chosen people, but also great blessings for all nations over the entire earth. Covenant promise is, *"Through them the nations of the earth will be blessed."*

A. Blessings for Gentiles (3:9-10)

In the Millennial age, the remnant of the people from every nation will worship the Lord in righteousness with pure lips as opposed to lying idolatrous speech. Pure speech comes from a pure heart.

B. Blessings for Jews (3:11-20)

God will have purged the arrogant and unrighteous from His people leaving a humble and righteous people to worship Him in spirit and in truth. Physical peace and prosperity will follow allowing them to enjoy their Lord unhindered as Christ, their Messiah, personally reigns in their midst.

God has glorious plans for His people (Jews and Christians) – to have a glorious relationship with us forever.

Homework:

- Read the books of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi