

# Old Testament Survey

## Nahum, Habakkuk & Zephaniah

# Nahum

- Prophesied during the reign of King Josiah
- Assyria was a threat to Judah (Israel had already been taken into captivity)
- A “war oracle” warning of God’s coming judgment on Assyria (represented by Nineveh)
- Mostly addressed to Nineveh or its king
- At least 125 years after Jonah’s message

# Nahum

- Assyria
  - Nineveh's repentance following Jonah's message was short-lived (Jonah 3:10). They were once again characterized by extreme wickedness, cruelty, and pride.
  - Described as the city of blood, full of lies and plunder, and never without victims (3:1).
  - The Assyrians were prosperous because they used their military might to prey on other nations.
  - They were idol worshippers (1:14) and participated in witchcraft and sorcery (3:4).
  - The people of Assyria were numerous; their merchants are described as being more than the stars of the sky (3:16).

# Nahum – Overview

- **Nineveh's Judge (1:1-15)**

- Nahum begins with God declaring that His jealousy and vengeance have been provoked and that He is filled with wrath for His enemies (1:2).
  - God's wrath is directed at the guilty (1:3)
  - God is slow to anger (1:3)
  - God is good (1:7)
- There is an emphasis on the severity of God's wrath and His greatness in creation (1:3-6).
- In contrast with His indignation directed at Nineveh, God promises that His punishment on Judah will end (1:12); no such promise is made to Assyria.

# Nahum – Overview

- **Nineveh's Judgment (2:1-13)**
  - God is against the Assyrians (2:13, see also 3:5).
  - There will be widespread judgment on Nineveh, from the greatest to the least: nobles, shepherds, and slave girls (2:6-7, see also 3:18).
  - Nahum's prophecy included visions of the destruction and loss that Nineveh would face on the day of God's judgment (2:3-10, see also 3:2-3).
  - The city will be plundered and the people will be terrified and demoralized (2:9-10).

# Nahum – Overview

- **Nineveh's Total Destruction (3:1-19)**
  - God decreed that Nineveh's destruction would be complete and irreversible (3:19).
  - There will be massive casualties (3:3) and God will scatter the survivors with no one to gather them (3:18).
  - Fire will consume both the people and their defenses (3:13, 15).
  - Assyria's legacy and the glory of their name will be destroyed along with them (3:5-7).

# Nahum – Themes

- **God as Judge of the Nations**
  - God's character (E.g., jealous, patient, just, righteous) and His wrath are established early in Nahum.
  - God's might is shown in nature and creation; He works through them and subdues them. His sovereignty also extends to His control over the destinies of nations.
  - He will reduce the security, the might, and the prosperity of Nineveh to nothing (2:11-13).
  - God's judgment contrasts His own righteousness and His just and triumphant kingdom with earthly kingdoms that are built on wickedness and tyranny.

# Nahum – Themes

- **Nineveh's Destruction**

- Assyria will never recover from the blow that they will be dealt (1:15; 3:19).
- They will be exposed to public disgrace (3:5-7).
- As Thebes was defeated at the hands of Assyria, so will the Assyrians be defeated (3:8-10).
- Nineveh was sacked in 612 B.C. by the Medes, Babylonians, and Scythians, fulfilling the prophecy.



# Nahum – Themes

- **God as a Refuge for His People**
  - The Lord is good and a refuge for those who trust in Him (1:7).
  - There is a call to remember God's faithfulness in His past acts of mercy and deliverance (1:4) . The Lord is mighty to save.
  - God will end Judah's affliction and free them from the yoke of Assyria (1:12-13).
  - Amidst judgment, there is a message of peace for Judah (1:15).
  - A time of restoration is promised (2:2).

# Conclusion

- God cares about His people and will return to judge and to vindicate.
- God is able to bring blessing and comfort through judgment.
- We should trust in God because He is mighty to save.

# Habakkuk

- Babylon was the ruling nation in Habakkuk's day
- Habakkuk's message addresses the internal problems of Judah
- A dialogue between Habakkuk and God
- Concern and frustration over the perceived lack of response from God to the problems within Judah

# Habakkuk – Overview

- **Habakkuk's First Complaint (1:1-4)**

- Habakkuk complained of Judah's corruption: injustice, conflict, and oppression.
- The wicked prospered at the expense of the righteous (1:4).
- God was silent (1:2).

- **God's Reply (1:5-11)**

- God was raising up the Babylonians (1:6).
- Babylon will be used as an instrument of judgment against Judah.
- Yet, Babylon is even more wicked than Judah.

# Habakkuk – Overview

- **Babylon**

- Babylon was a wicked and arrogant nation (2:4-5).
- They were powerful and did whatever they wanted, men were helpless against them (1:14-15).
- They were bent on violence (1:9) and were ruthless in their destruction of other nations (1:17), laying waste the cities and killing both men and animals (2:17).
- They were idol worshippers (1:16; 2:18-19).
- They were materialistic and their greed was insatiable (2:5-7).
- They acted through crime and bloodshed and put their trust in their own achievements to become a lasting kingdom (2:9, 12).

# Habakkuk – Overview

- **Habakkuk's Second Complaint (1:12-2:1)**

- Habakkuk didn't understand why God would allow a treacherous nation have their way with those who were more righteous (1:13).
- God works out His justice in ways beyond our understanding.
- Habakkuk resolved to wait for the Lord's response (2:1).

- **God's Reply (2:2-20)**

- Babylon will be punished at the appointed time (2:3).
- Their punishment will fit their crimes (2:6-8, 16).
- The tables will be turned on Babylon; those under them will rise up and strike them with fear.
- God's purpose was to glorify Himself (2:14).

# Habakkuk – Overview

- **Habakkuk's Prayer (3:1-19)**

- Habakkuk recalls the past faithfulness of God.
- He marvels at God's deeds and pleads for mercy (3:2).
- He praises the Lord for His glory and greatness (3:6-11).
- A reaffirmation of his resolve to wait patiently for God's day of judgment and to rejoice in Him even in dire circumstances (3:16-18).

# Habakkuk – Themes

- **God's Sovereignty**

- God is sovereign over all of creation, creation responds to and submits to Him (3:6-11).
- He is Lord over all the nations to raise them up (1:6) and to depose them (3:12-13).
- He is sovereign over the wicked, who serve His purposes.
- He will strengthen those who put their faith in Him (3:19).



# Habakkuk – Themes

- **“The Righteous will Live by Faith”**
  - We are called to “live by faith” (2:4) and in reverent trust in Him. He is trustworthy and will fulfill His promises.
  - Habakkuk’s response was one of faith (3:16).
  - Know God and trust in Him even in bleak circumstances (3:16-19).
  - Lack of faith leads to selfish ambition, evil desires, and pride.

# Conclusion

- God's ways are not our ways, He does not "owe" us an explanation for His actions.
- God uses even the wicked to accomplish His good purposes.
- God reveals enough of Himself that we can trust Him confidently.
- When God seems distant or unjust is our response one of faith or of doubt?

# Zephaniah

- Zephaniah prophesied during the early reign of King Josiah (before his national reform)
- A contemporary of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Jeremiah
- Alternates between first-person speeches (God) and third-person speeches (Zephaniah)
- About the coming judgment of the world – first for Judah, then for foreign nations, concluding with future blessings for the faithful

# Zephaniah – Overview

- **The Day of the Lord Comes on Judah & the Nations (1:1-13)**
  - The day of the Lord will come first against Judah and those in Jerusalem.
  - The people had become assimilated to the pagan nations around them (1:8-9).
  - There will be punishment for idolatry (1:4-6) as well as for complacency (1:12).
  - On the day of judgment there will be wailing, great distress, and destruction (1:10-13).

# Zephaniah – Overview

- **God's Judgment on the Nations (1:14-3:8)**
  - The whole world will be consumed on the day of the Lord.
  - Details specific forms of judgment against:
    - Philistia (2:4-7)
    - Moab & Ammon (2:8-11)
    - Cush (2:12)
    - Assyria (2:13-15)
    - Jerusalem (3:1-8)
  - Yet, there will be hope for a remnant (2:7, 9).

# Zephaniah – Overview

- **Redemption of the Remnant (3:9-20)**
  - God will bring purity to a remnant of the people so that they will call on Him (3:9, 13).
  - God will remove the proud and haughty but the humble and those who trust in Him will remain.
  - God will withdraw His hand of punishment and the people of Israel will be made secure (3:15).
  - Their enemies and oppressors will be punished and the faithful will see that the Lord is with them and is mighty to save.

# Zephaniah – Themes

- **The Day of the Lord**

- The day of the Lord is mentioned seven times in Zephaniah (1:7, 8, 14(x2), 18; 2:2, 3).
- It is the day when God will appear in judgment against sin to vindicate His own honour.
- It is also the day when He will create a purified remnant for Himself, a demonstration of His faithfulness and mercy.
- Displays God's complete rule over all nations.
- The day of the Lord will be sudden, all-encompassing, and inescapable.

# Zephaniah – Themes

- **God's Salvation**

- God gives undeserved grace and restoration in the midst of His wrath. Those who had been scattered will once again be gathered (the remnant).
- There are elements of mercy mixed with the judgment (2:7, 9; 3:10-20).
- There is hope of salvation for the humble and obedient while those who oppose God have only punishment and wrath to face.
- God uses judgment to refine and purify His people (3:9, 13).



# Conclusion

- God will one day bring judgment upon the world and purify a remnant that He will set apart for eternity.
- Our reconciliation with God has been accomplished through Christ; His followers have nothing to fear.
- Before the Lord returns, we should seek Him in righteousness and humility (2:3) and learn to wait patiently and confidently for Him.

# Next class

- Jeremiah & Lamentations

# References

- Longman, Tremper III, and Raymond B. Dillard. An Introduction to the Old Testament, second edition. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006.
- NIV Study Bible
- <http://www.capitolhillbaptist.org/we-equip/adults/core-seminars/old-testament/>