

CHAPTER 12

Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah

In this chapter we want to consider five more of the minor prophets. All five of these books were written *before the exile* (see chapter 9), that is, before the Babylonian Captivity. Let us now look at these books one by one:

Jonah—God's Love For All the World

Perhaps no book in the Bible has been attacked and ridiculed more than the book of Jonah! Unbelievers proudly say that it is absolutely impossible for a man to be swallowed alive by a whale and to be spit up three days later alive! They say that the story of Jonah could not have really happened and that it is just a big "fish story" (a whale of a tale), a fable or a make-believe story like *Gulliver's Travels* or *Peter Pan*.

We must always remember what Jesus said about God's Word: "thy Word is _____" (John 17:17). In the book of 2 Kings we learn that Jonah was a very real person who lived about the time of wicked King Jeroboam II (the King of Israel). In 2 Kings 14:25 we read these words: ". . . according to the word of the LORD God of Israel, which He spoke by the hand of his servant _____, the son of Amittai (see Jonah 1:1), the prophet, which was of Gathhepher." Jeroboam was a real king (2 Kings 14:23). Israel was a real nation. And Jonah was not a figment of the imagination. He was a real prophet who had a real father and who came from a real town.

Was this man Jonah really swallowed by a large sea creature? Let's see what Jesus Himself said about Jonah and the whale: "Jonas (Jonah) was three days and three nights in the _____" (Matthew 12:40; compare Jonah 1:17). Did Jesus believe that the account of Jonah actually happened? ____ Did Jesus believe that Jonah really went and preached to the people of Nineveh (Matthew 12:41)? _____ **JESUS SAID IT! I BELIEVE IT! THAT SETTLES IT!** The story of Jonah is not only amazing and interesting and exciting, but it is also true!

Jonah's Assignment

Jonah had a God-given assignment. God spoke to His prophet Jonah and said, "Arise, go to _____, that great city, and cry against it (preach against their sin); for their _____ is come up before Me" (Jonah 1:2). Jonah was given this assignment almost 800 years before Christ was born in Bethlehem. At this time Nineveh was a great Assyrian city. God told Jonah to go to this heathen city and to preach to these heathen people. And remember, the Assyrians were Israel's enemies!

The Most Dreadful Power on Earth

The Assyrian army was the most feared army in all of the Near East. These people were very warlike and very cruel. They would use psychological warfare. This means that they would try to put fear into the minds of their enemies. The Assyrians would first terrify and then they would

conquer. Often people were half defeated before they were even attacked. In Isaiah 36 we read about the Assyrians who were about to attack Jerusalem and how they tried to first frighten the Jews.

The Assyrians would do cruel and frightful things as they conquered city after city. They would sometimes take a captured enemy and skin him alive. They would also cut off the heads of their enemies and pile them up in the form of a pyramid. Those still within the city would see things like this and be terrified. During a later period the Assyrians would surround a city and if they caught anyone trying to escape, they would kill him and hang him up on a pole or wooden stake so that everyone in the city could see the victim. The Assyrians showed no mercy and for many years they were the most powerful kingdom in this part of the world. Later on (after Jonah's time), it was these very same Assyrians who destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel and carried away the people as captives (see chapter 5). God used this wicked nation to punish His sinful people.

Jonah was sent by God to these wicked Assyrians! Now you can better understand what God meant when He spoke of "their wickedness" (Jonah 1:2)!

Why Did Jonah Run the Opposite Way?

Read Jonah 1:3. Can you find the city of Nineveh on a Bible map? Jonah got on a ship which was heading west on the Mediterranean Sea! Was he going in the right direction or was he going in the opposite direction from which God told him to go?

Why did Jonah fail to carry out God's assignment? Some say that Jonah was afraid to go to Nineveh. But in Jonah 1:11-12 we learn that Jonah was a man of great courage. He certainly was not afraid to die! Some say that Jonah was a very weak and inferior prophet who had all kinds of spiritual problems. But in 2 Kings 14:25 Jonah the prophet is called God's S_____. Also Jonah himself boldly and proudly said, "I _____ the LORD, the God of heaven" (Jonah 1:9). Jonah was a man of prayer (chapter 2) who knew how to come before a holy God (see Jonah 2:4,7). God used Jonah's preaching in a mighty way (chapter 3). Even Jesus recognized Jonah's greatness as a preacher and He compared Jonah to Himself: "and behold, a _____ than Jonas (Jonah) is here" (Matthew 12:41).

Why did Jonah fail to carry out God's assignment? Why did Jonah flee in the opposite direction? The answer is found in the last part of Jonah 4:2 "Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a _____ God, and _____, slow to _____ and of great _____ and repentest thee of the evil." (Jonah 4:2)

Jonah knew what the cruel and warlike Assyrians were really like. Jonah knew that these people were the enemies of God and the enemies of God's people, the Jews. Jonah knew about the great "wickedness" of these people (Jonah 1:2). Jonah was a man who knew about the **holiness** of God and the **justice** of God (sin must be punished). Jonah was a godly Jew who hated sin and who wanted sin to be punished. He did not want God to spare the Assyrians who lived in Nineveh; he wanted God to judge them. He refused to go to Nineveh because he was afraid God might not destroy this city. The Assyrians had never shown any mercy to their enemies, so why should God show mercy to them? God should judge them, not be gracious to them! God should pour out His wrath against them quickly, instead of being slow to anger! Jonah thought that these people should get just what they deserved, and he was right! But Jonah needed to learn a lesson

about the grace and longsuffering of God! (*Note*: the great man of God Moses had to learn a similar lesson in Numbers chapter 20.)

Special Delivery!

The fact that Jonah was swallowed by a great sea creature was no accident. It was not Jonah's "lucky day." The Bible tells us that "the LORD had _____ a great fish to _____ up Jonah" (Jonah 1:17). God had the right animal in the right place at the right time to accomplish His will! (Notice what else God prepared in Jonah 4:6,7,8.)

God gave Jonah the same assignment a second time (Jonah 3:1-2). Did Jonah obey (Jonah 3:3)? _____ Did Jonah preach (Jonah 3:4)? _____ Did the people of Nineveh believe the message (Jonah 3:5)? _____ Did the Assyrians turn from their evil way (Jonah 3:10)? _____ Did the Assyrians repent (Matthew 12:41)? _____ Did God judge them or did God spare them (Jonah 3:10)? _____ Was Jonah happy or angry (Jonah 4:1)? _____

The heathen sailors were more concerned for Jonah than Jonah was for the heathen Assyrians. The sailors did not want Jonah to be destroyed (Jonah 1:12-14), but Jonah wanted the Assyrians to be destroyed (Jonah 3:10 and 4:1). Also Jonah was more concerned for a **gourd** (a plant) than he was for a city filled with thousands of people. He had pity on the plant and was angry when the worm destroyed it (Jonah 4:6-9), but he had no pity for the people of Nineveh (Jonah 4:10-11). He wanted them destroyed!

Concern for the Lost

The world is filled with wicked people who deserve to be judged and destroyed by a holy God. But the good news found in the Bible is this: "For God so loved the _____" (John 3:16). If the Lord should mark iniquities and hold our sins against us, *none of us would stand* (compare Psalm 130:3), not even Jonah! But "there is _____ with thee" (Psalm 130:4). Jonah was angry because God was so gracious (Jonah 4:2). We ought to be thankful every day that God is gracious and slow to anger! If this were not true, we would all be doomed! It is not just the Assyrians who have sinned. The Bible says, "_____ have sinned" (Romans 3:23)! But the good news is that "salvation is of the _____" (Jonah 2:9)!

Are you concerned for lost men, women, boys and girls? God has a wonderful message of salvation that He wants all men to hear (Mark 16:15). Are you willing to help take this message to lost people? What are some of the ways you can help to do this?

The book of Jonah reminds us of the wonderful truth taught in Romans 3:29! God has a heart of love and compassion for all men and He desires all men to be saved (1 Timothy 2:3-4). Do you?

The Greatest Sign of All

Read Jonah 1:17. Jonah's stay in the belly of the great fish was a **sign**! It was a sign that pointed to the greatest event in the history of the world. Jesus spoke of this sign in Matthew 12:39-40 and Matthew 16:4. Notice the words of Matthew 12:40—"As Jonah . . . so the Son of Man." Jonah was in the whale; Jesus was in the earth. After three days Jonah came out; after three days Jesus rose again, and came forth from the tomb in victory! Jonah's experience in and out of the whale was a clear sign that pointed to **the resurrection of Jesus Christ**! After Jonah came forth

from the fish, God's message went forth to the Gentiles (the Assyrians). After Jesus arose from the dead, God's message went forth to the Gentiles (into all the world--Mark 16:15). Every believer living today is a walking proof of God's love and concern for **all men!** God's love is *expansive* (expanding and spreading out to all) not *exclusive* (limited only to a few).

Micah–The King Born in Bethlehem

Micah was a Hebrew prophet who lived more than 700 years before Christ. He lived at the same time as another great prophet. What was his name (Isaiah 1:1)? _____ In Isaiah chapter 1 we learn something about the spiritual condition of the Jewish people who lived during the days of Micah and Isaiah. Read Isaiah 1:2-6,16,18. How are these people described?

How would you describe the people that live in our nation today?

During the time of Micah the Jewish people were divided into two kingdoms: the southern kingdom called Judah, with its capital in Jerusalem, and the northern kingdom called Israel, with its capital in Samaria. God gave Micah special messages about what two cities (Micah 1:1)? 1) _____ 2) _____ Can you locate these two cities on a Bible map?

The name Micah means "Who is like the LORD?" How would you answer this question? Is there anyone else that can do what God can do (see Micah 7:18)? _____ Many years before, Moses had asked this same question (see Exodus 15:11). How would you answer this question?

The Jewish people who lived in the days of Micah needed to know that there was no one like the Lord! Many of the Jews had turned away from the Lord and were worshipping idols. If God is the only God, then idolatry is foolish, sinful and wrong.

The Christmas Prophets

Isaiah and Micah are sometimes called "The Christmas Prophets." They both lived at the same time (about 700 years before Christ came) and they both wrote about the birth of the Messiah.

Isaiah's "Christmas words" are found in Isaiah 7:14 and 9:6-7 (see Chapter 9). These verses clearly foretold that God would be born as a baby and that He would be born of a virgin.

Micah's famous "Christmas words" are found in Micah 5:2--"But thou, _____ Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto me that is to be _____ in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from _____." ***The everlasting God will be born in Bethlehem!*** And remember, Micah wrote these words 700 years before the birth of Christ ever happened!

Seven hundred years later the wise men came to Jerusalem asking, "**Where** is He that is born King of the Jews?" (Matthew 2:1-2). The Jews knew where to find the correct answer! They looked in the book of Micah and they knew that the birthplace of the Messiah must be B _____ (Matthew 2:5-6). The wise men went to this small shepherding town and they worshipped the King!

The Message God Gave Micah

Micah was a great prophet of the Lord. We even read about Micah in Jeremiah's book (see Jeremiah 26:18-19) which speaks of the ministry Micah had during the days of King Hezekiah.

As we think about the book of Micah, what is the message that God gave to the Jewish people so long ago? Several things could be said:

1) *Ritualism is no substitute for righteousness.* Ritualism is going through the outward motions and being "religious" on the outside without being right on the inside. God wants righteousness on the inside and on the outside. In the days of Micah the Jews were very **religious** but they were not **righteous** (see Isaiah chapter 1). God wants a right heart and a right relationship with Himself: "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do _____ (righteously) and to love _____, and to walk _____ with thy God" (Micah 6:8--one of the key verses in the book).

2) *Sin leads to certain judgment.* **Sin** (man's wrong attitude and action) leads to the judgment of God. God cannot bless sin; He must judge it! When men go *against* God, God must go against them. Persistent sin leads to sure ruin! Did the Jews have a problem with sin in the days of Micah (Micah 1:5)? _____

3) *God has a solution to man's problem.* God's solution to man's problem is found in the Person of the Saviour who would someday come out of Bethlehem (Micah 5:2)! He wants to rule in man's heart today (Micah 6:8), and in the future He will rule over the entire world (Micah 4:1-7--the kingdom!).

4) *God delights to pardon and forgive.* God hates sin but He loves the souls of sinners! What verses in Micah chapter 7 show us that God is a pardoning and forgiving God? _____ We learned the same thing about God in Jonah 4:2!

Have You Heard God's Message?

God's message must be **heard** and **heeded**! Micah had a wonderful message from God about a Saviour who would be born in Bethlehem and about a God who is ready to forgive sinners. But if people do not have ears to hear this message, then it will do them no good.

Three times in his book Micah reminds us of the importance of hearing God's message:

Micah 1:2--"_____, all ye people!"

Micah 3:1--"And I said, _____, I pray you!"

Micah 6:1--"_____ ye now what the LORD saith!"

Jesus Christ said, "He that hath an _____ let him _____" (Revelation 2:7).

Ritualism is no substitute for righteousness!

Nahum--The Doom of Nineveh

There are two minor prophets who speak of God's judgment upon heathen peoples. As we have already studied (in Chapter 11), the book of Obadiah is all about the doom of Edom. The book of Nahum is all about the doom of Nineveh--that great capital city of the Assyrian empire!

Nineveh was called "that _____ city" (Jonah 1:2). This immense city was located by

the Tigris River (can you find it on the map?). This city was surrounded by great walls which were perhaps as much as 40 feet thick. It was said that six chariots could ride abreast on the top of these massive walls.

When Nahum gave his prophecy it seemed very unlikely that the great Assyrian empire would ever fall. The Assyrian nation was at the height of its power and it was known and feared as the greatest military power in that part of the world (see our study of Jonah). But the same God who could bring down proud Edom (see Obadiah 1:3-4) is the same God who could bring down proud Assyria!

Nineveh was great in another way. Nineveh was great in *SIN* and *WICKEDNESS*. "Woe to the _____ city" (Nahum 3:1). It was a bloody, cruel and sinful city!

Jonah–Part 2

The book of Nahum could be called Part 2 of the book of Jonah. In the book of Jonah we also learned about the Assyrians. When Jonah preached God's message to them the people of Nineveh "believed _____" (Jonah 3:5) and "they turned from their _____ way" (3:10). As a result God spared the city and did not judge it (Jonah 3:10).

In the days of Jonah the Assyrians turned from their evil way, but later they turned back to their evil way! The repentance in the days of Jonah was only temporary, not permanent. The new generations that rose up repeated the former wickedness (see Jonah 1:2). The people living in Nineveh in Jonah's day were headed on a collision course. They only had 40 days until God's judgment would fall (Jonah 3:4). But these people **changed their direction** (Jonah 3:5-10) and God spared them! Later the Assyrians changed their direction again and once more they put themselves on a collision course. Once again they were headed straight for judgment!

God is very longsuffering and slow to anger. He gave the wicked Assyrians much longer than 40 days! In fact He gave them much longer than 40 years! The great city of Nineveh was finally destroyed in 612 B.C. as it was invaded and ruined by the Babylonians and the Medes. This was almost 200 years after Jonah preached to the same city! God delayed His judgment for almost 200 years, but finally the judgment came (see Nahum 3:7,15,19)! The city was doomed and in 612 B.C. it was destroyed, and for more than 2000 years the city lay in ruins. Only recently (in 1843) have the ruins of the city been discovered and excavated (dug up).

God is Longsuffering...But

"The Lord is _____ to _____" (Nahum 1:3), but this does not mean that His judgment will never come! The God who is slow to anger is also the God who "will not at all acquit the _____" (Nahum 1:3). This means that the wicked must be punished for their sins. God cannot overlook sin and pretend that it does not exist.

People must choose to either go God's way (the salvation course) or to go against God's way (the collision course). Those who choose to go against God's way must realize that the day of collision (judgment) will come, even if it does not come today. Judgment is inevitable and inescapable! It is just a matter of time.

There is only one way to be on a salvation course. There is only one way to enjoy God's goodness instead of having to face God's judgment. The secret is found in Nahum 1:7: "The LORD is _____, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and He knoweth them that

_____ in Him." Do you trust in the *goodness of God* and in the *God who is good*?
 _____ If not, then prepare to meet the Judge! **Vengeance belongs to God!**

Habakkuk--The Just Shall Live By Faith

The book of Habakkuk was written shortly before the Babylonian invasion which is spoken of in chapter 1, verses 5-9. The prophet Habakkuk was a man who was perplexed. We could call him Mr. Question Mark! He had certain questions which he wanted God to answer.

Habakkuk was concerned about the problem of sin and evil in the world. He knew that his God was perfectly **holy**: "Thou art of _____ eyes than to behold _____, and canst not look on _____" (Habakkuk 1:13). He also called God "mine _____ One" (Habakkuk 1:12). How can this kind of a God allow sin and evil? If God is holy and hates sin and evil, how can He allow it?

Habakkuk's Two Questions

Question Number 1--Why does God permit evil? See Habakkuk 1:2-4. Habakkuk saw the evil and sin that was around him. The Jewish people had turned away from the Lord "Why doesn't God do anything? Why does it seem as though evil is in control? Why doesn't God's judgment go forth? How can God allow evil and sin to go on and on?"

God's Answer--Though it may seem as though evil is in control, God is really in control. God will do something about sin and His judgment will go forth! God will not allow sin to go on forever. In Habakkuk 1:5-11 God tells his prophet that the Babylonians (Chaldeans) will soon come to invade and conquer the Jews. God will judge the Jews by using the Babylonians!

Question Number 2--God's answer to the first question puzzled Habakkuk even more and made him ask another question: **Why would God permit His people to be punished by a nation more wicked than they** (Habakkuk 1:13)? God was using the Babylonians to spank His people Israel. Why would God spank the Jews with a people who were more wicked than the Jews? Why?

God's Answer--Habakkuk asked good questions and most importantly of all He asked the **right Person!** God knows what He is doing (Habakkuk 2:20)! God is also going to judge the wicked Babylonians! The real answer is found in the key verse of the book, Habakkuk 2:4: "Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the _____ shall _____ by his faith." This verse teaches that **pride leads to death but faith leads to life!** It speaks of two groups: "one group which is crooked is flowing toward destruction; the other group, by faith, is moving toward God" (J.Vernon McGee). This verse is so important that it is quoted three times in the New Testament: Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11 and Hebrews 10:38. **Believe God and thou shalt live** (see John 6:47; 1 John 5:11-12)! Faith is the key to life!

God wants to bring each one of us from questions to faith. The book of Habakkuk begins with an interrogation mark (?) and closes with an exclamation mark (!). At the end of the book Habakkuk is rejoicing in the Lord His strength (Habakkuk 3:18-19)!

When you are perplexed about some of life's toughest questions, remember this: 1. God has the answer. 2. God knows what He is doing (Habakkuk 2:20). 3. Faith is the key: you need to simply take God at His Word and believe what He says! The life of faith (Hab. 2:4) is the life of joy (Hab. 3:18). **Do not judge by appearance but by God's Word!**

Zephaniah–The Day Of The Lord

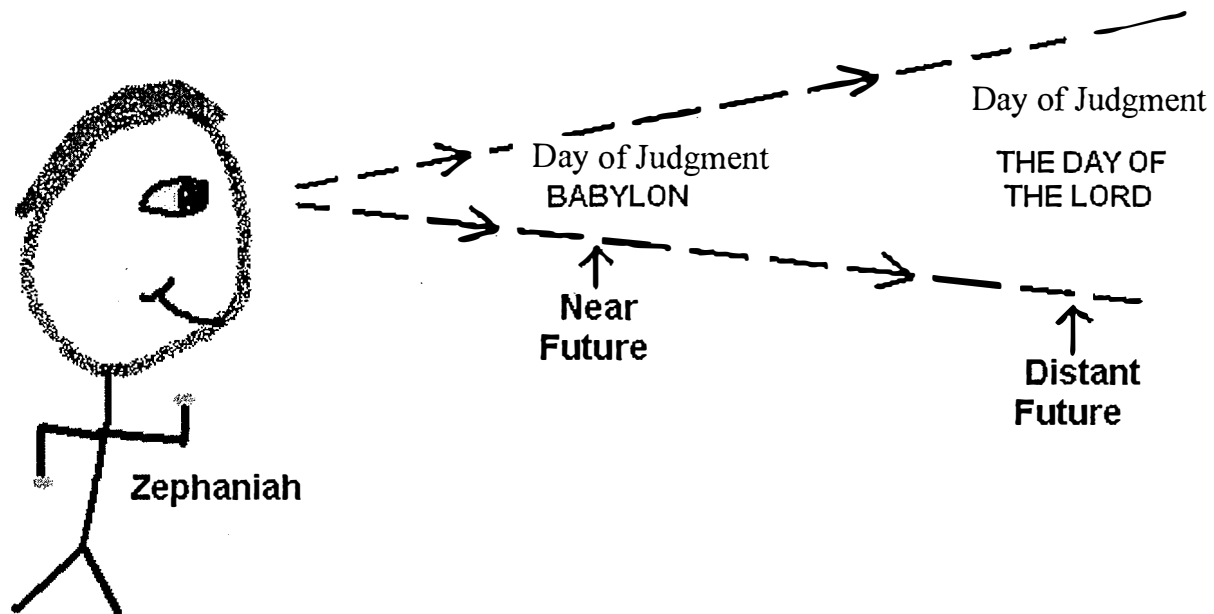
The theme of the book of Zephaniah is **the day of the LORD**. What other book in the minor prophets had this same theme (see Chapter 11)? _____ Zephaniah uses this expression ("**the day of the LORD**") more than any other prophet (seven times).

The day of the LORD is described in Zephaniah 1:14-16:

It is a day of _____
 It is a day of _____
 It is a day of _____
 It is a day of _____

We are told again and again that this will be a day of the Lord's anger and wrath (Zephaniah 1:15; 2:2,3)! It is a day of judgment!

Zephaniah lived during the time of King Josiah, the king of Judah (see the chart in Chapter 5). Zephaniah was the great, great grandson of King Hezekiah (Zephaniah 1:1). The book of Zephaniah looks ahead and sees the coming invasion of Babylon as a day of the Lord's anger and judgment. But the Babylonian invasion was only a picture of a much greater "day of the LORD" in the distant future:



Zephaniah saw more than God's judgment. He also saw God's wonderful love (see Zephaniah 3:17) and God's wonderful kingdom for those who trust Him (see Zephaniah 3:14-20). Most of the prophets warned of coming judgment, but they also encouraged God's people by giving glimpses of the coming kingdom age.

How can a person be safe in a time of trouble and in a time of judgment? God's judgment is near but God Himself is near also, and *now* is the time to seek Him: "_____ ye the LORD, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek _____, seek _____: it may be ye shall be _____ in the day of the LORD's _____" (Zephaniah 2:3)! Have you found God's hiding place? Are you hiding there?