**Old Testament Survey**

**Book of Micah**

The names of the kings in Micah 1:1 tell us that the prophet preached at the same time in history as Isaiah (Isa. 1:1). This little book is composed of three “sermons” that Micah preached to the people, and each message begins with the word “hear.” He deals with three very practical and important themes:

**Judgment Is Coming (1–2)**

1. Micah wastes no time getting into his message. God has spoken to him and warned him that the sins of the people are so great that He must send judgment. He names the capital cities in v. 1—Jerusalem (capital of Judah, the Southern Kingdom) and Samaria (capital of Israel, the Northern Kingdom). In fact, in this first message, Micah names twelve cities and points out their sins. The sins of the cities were polluting the whole nation.
2. Idolatry (“high places” in 1:5) was the main sin. The people insisted on worshiping “the works of their own hands” (5:13). Micah warned that the day would come when God would destroy the idols of the people and turn them to dust (1:6–7).
3. In 2:1 we see the sin of covetousness: people would lie awake at night thinking up new ways to get “things,” and then get up early to carry out their plans. According to Col. 3:5, covetousness is idolatry. The people were not only covetous, but they used illegal means to get what they wanted.
4. How did Micah respond to this awful message of judgment? He wept and mourned (1:8–9). Then he sent a personal message to each of the wicked cities, warning them that the day of God’s wrath was just around the corner.
5. How did the people react to Micah’s preaching? They tried to stop him. In 2:6 they say, “Stop preaching such terrible things! You know they will not happen to us. We are God’s people.” But Micah says, “I must preach—the Spirit of God compels me.” Micah knew that the people did not want honest preaching; they preferred their drunken false prophets who lived as wickedly as the people did (2:10–11).

**The Deliverer Is Coming (3–5)**

1. Not discouraged by their slanders, Micah moves now into his second message, a message of hope. First he condemns the wicked leaders of the land—the rulers, the false prophets, and the priests (3:1–7). They were devouring the people instead of helping them, and they refused to serve unless they were paid. It was the sin of covetousness again. The prophets were preaching what the people wanted to hear: “All is well—nothing will happen to us.” But Micah knew that Israel would fall to Assyria (this happened in 721), and that the Babylonians would carry Judah away captive (this happened in 606–586).
2. Chapter 4, takes up a wonderful new theme: one day there will be peace on earth and righteousness will reign. Mt. Zion will become the capital of the world; all the armies will be dismissed and the weapons destroyed. How can this happen? Through the promise in chapter 5: The Deliverer will come. Micah has mentioned twelve cities, but now he mentions one more—Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus (5:2–3; Matt. 2:6). It is this prophecy that led the wise men to Jesus.
3. Of course, the Jews rejected their Prince of Peace, so there has been no peace in the world. But when Christ returns to earth, He will establish His kingdom of peace and there shall be no more war. Meanwhile, men and women can have peace in their hearts by trusting Christ as Savior (Rom. 5:1). And this is the theme of Micah’s final message, for he calls the people to make their decision to trust the Lord and obey Him.

**Trust the Lord Today (6–7)**

1. The scene here is a courtroom, and God has called His people to be judged. “State your case against Me,” He says. “I have a complaint against you,” announces the Lord, “for I have done all I can do for you, yet you have rejected Me. I brought you out of Egypt; I led you in the wilderness; I protected you from your enemies. What more could I have done?”
2. In 6:6–8, the people answer: “Yes, we have sinned. How can we make up for all that we have done? We could bring sacrifices, but they can never wash away sins. All our religion can never save us. Even if we sacrificed our own children, that would not cleanse us. We know what God wants us to do: to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly before our God.” How true this is! He wants our hearts (Ps. 51:16–17; 1 Sam. 15:22; Isa. 1:10–18).
3. God speaks again in 6:9–16. “You must repent and obey, because judgment is on the way. Then you will discover how terrible your sins have been. You will try to satisfy yourselves, but it will not work. You will eat but still be hungry; you will save money, but it will vanish; you will plant crops but never harvest them.” What a tragic picture. Imagine seeing everything you do accomplish nothing because you are out of the will of God.
4. Micah the prophet speaks in 7:1–10. He laments the fact that the nation is so wicked he cannot find an honest man. If God is going to punish, all Micah can do is wait patiently for Him to work. If the Lord chastens His own people for their sins, certainly He will punish the enemy for their sins also.
5. In 7:11–17, God makes promises to His people that He will restore them in the future. The wicked cities will be restored and cleansed, and the nation will be established in glory. But first, the Jews must go through a time of tribulation. They have been suffering for centuries, of course, but there will be a special time of trial after Christ takes the church to heaven. This is the Tribulation, or the time of Jacob’s trouble.
6. The closing verses (7:18–20) are a wonderful confession of faith, the whole purpose of Micah’s message. He wants to bring the people to faith in the Lord. God is the only One who can forgive sins (Mark 2:7; Ps. 32:5). He alone will show mercy and love to sinners; He will cast their sins into the depths of the sea. This is the theme of Micah’s last message: “Trust the Lord today!”

**Book of Nahum**

Imagine how happy the people of Judah were when they heard: “Nineveh has fallen! The Assyrian empire is no more!” (1:15) Assyria was a ruthless enemy that practiced brutality on men, women, and children. Assyria had been used of God to chasten the Northern Kingdom of Israel; that happened in 721 B.C. In 701 B.C., the Assyrians tried to conquer Judah, but God intervened and destroyed their army (Isa. 36–37). Finally in 612 B.C., Nineveh was destroyed by the Medes and the Babylonians; and so complete was their conquest that the ruins of the city remained undiscovered until 1842. It was concerning this future destruction of Nineveh that Nahum wrote. He wrote this little book at a time when Assyria was at the very peak of her power. Nobody would have dreamed that mighty Nineveh would fall, but God knows the future and He gave His message to Nahum to deliver to the frightened people of Judah. This was not a message of warning to Nineveh; they had heard God’s warning from Jonah a century and a half before. No, there was no hope for Nineveh; God’s patience had run out and His judgment would fall. Rather, this was a message of hope for Judah, to encourage them to trust God at an hour of great danger. Each of the three chapters tells us something about God and also about the fall of the city.

**God Is Jealous: Nineveh Will Fall (1)**

1. The word “jealous” when applied to God does not suggest envy or selfishness. He is slow to anger; in fact, He gave Nineveh 150 years of mercy. But they had gone too far in their brutality and violence, and God had to judge them.
2. In vv. 8–13, Nahum describes the fall of the city with two pictures: a great flood of waters that sweeps everything away; and a fire of dry thorns that burns like stubble. It is interesting to note that Nineveh did fall because of a flood of waters. The Medes and Babylonians besieged the city for many months and made little headway. Then the rainy season came and the two rivers next to Nineveh began to rise. The swelling waters beat against the thick walls of Nineveh and broke them down. The city was literally destroyed by the flood; see also Nahum 2:6. God does not need armies; He can use tiny raindrops!
3. God makes two wonderful promises to His people in this chapter. In 1:7, He assures them of His goodness and tells them they will be safe so long as they trust in Him. In 1:12, He assures them that He will not afflict them again with the Assyrian armies the way Israel had been afflicted before.

**God Is Judge: Nineveh’s Fall Is Great (2)**

1. Chapter 2 is a vivid picture of the invasion of the city and its ultimate fall. Assyria had emptied Israel in 721; now God was going to restore His people by punishing the enemy (vv. 1–2).
2. Note the repeated reference to lions in vv. 11–13. The lion was the symbol of the Assyrian empire, as you can see from pictures in history. They built huge statues of lions with the heads of men. “Where are your lions now?” Nahum asks. “Where are your rulers, your champions?”
3. “I am against you” (v. 13, nkjv). God brought the Medes and Babylonians against Nineveh and permitted them to spoil the city and take its wealth.

**God Is Just: Nineveh Deserves to Fall (3)**

1. In 3:1 we see the great sins of Assyria listed: murders, lies, and covetousness. The Assyrians had murdered thousands of innocent people; now their own people would be slain and their bodies stacked in the streets like lumber. This is the justice of God. And in that day of judgment, the Assyrian soldiers (usually so brave) would act like frightened women.
2. In vv. 15–17, Nahum compares the battle to a plague of locusts. Just as the worms eat up the crops, so the enemy would eat up the city. The Assyrian soldiers would be as strong as grasshoppers. Then in v. 18 Nahum sees the Assyrians as a slaughtered flock of sheep, their shepherds (rulers) dead.
3. When the nations got the report of the destruction of Assyria, they clapped their hands and shouted for joy. The Lord judges the sins of nations and the sins of individuals. It is tragic to reject His warnings and persist in sin. “Be sure your sins will find you out.”

**Book of Habakkuk**

Have you ever looked out upon this world with its injustice and violence, and asked the question: “Why doesn’t God do something?” It looks like the wicked are prospering and the righteous are suffering. Godly people pray, but it seems as though their prayers do no good. This is the problem faced and solved in Habakkuk. Note three acts in this personal drama as the prophet faces his doubts and finds certainty in his faith.

**The Prophet Wondering (1)**

1. This was the first problem that puzzled the prophet. He looked out across the world of that day and saw violence (1:2–3, 9; 2:8, 17), injustice, spoiling, strife, and contention. The law was not enforced; there was no legal protection for innocent people who were sentenced as guilty. The courts were manipulated by selfish lawyers and cruel officials. The whole nation was suffering because of the evils of the government. Yet God seemed to be doing nothing about it. Along with these internal problems was the threat of the Babylonian empire as it swept across the political landscape.
2. God gave the prophet an answer in 5–11. “I am working a work that will amaze you,” God said. “I will raise up the Chaldeans who will conquer the nations and be my instrument to chasten the people.” How true it is that God is working in our world and we fail to realize it (Rom. 8:28; 2 Cor. 4:17).
3. God’s answer in vv. 5–11 only created a new problem for Habakkuk. He could not understand how a holy God could use such a wicked nation to punish His own chosen people, the Jews. “It is true that we have sinned,” says Habakkuk, “and we deserve chastening; but the Chaldeans are far more wicked than we are. If anyone deserves punishment, it is the Chaldeans.” Can a holy God sit and watch His own people being caught like fish or trampled like insects? (vv. 14–15) The Chaldeans will boast, “Our gods have given us the victory. Jehovah is not the true God.”

**The Prophet Watching and Waiting (2)**

1. Habakkuk went to his watchtower to pray, meditate, and wait on the Lord. He knew that God heard his complaint and that He would send an answer soon. God did answer. “I have a plan and a schedule,” God said. “It will all work out in due time, so don’t become impatient.” Then God gave to Habakkuk three very wonderful assurances to encourage and strengthen him during those difficult days. “The just shall live by faith” (v. 4). “The earth shall be filled with God’s glory” (v. 14). “The Lord is in His holy temple” (v. 20).
2. This is why the just live by faith. “For we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7; 4:18). If we look at ourselves, or at circumstances, we will be discouraged and want to quit, but if we look up to God by faith, and ahead to the glorious return of Christ, then we will be encouraged and enabled to go on in victory.

**The Prophet Worshiping (3)**

1. Habakkuk is a changed man! Instead of complaining, he is praising the Lord. God turns sighing into singing if we (like Habakkuk) take time to wait before Him in prayer and listen to His Word.
2. First, the prophet prays (v. 2). “I see that You are working in this world,” says the prophet, referring to 1:5. “Now continue that work—keep it alive and finish it.”
3. Then the prophet ponders (vv. 3–16). He reviews the history of Israel and the wonderful works of the Lord. This poetic description of God’s mighty power does not seem to follow any special pattern, nor does it cover all the main events in Jewish history. But Habakkuk knew that God had worked in the past, and therefore he could trust Him to work in the present and future.
4. Finally, the prophet praises (vv. 17–19). These verses represent one of the greatest confessions of faith found in the Bible. “Though everything around me fail—the fields, the vineyards, the flocks, the herds—yet will I rejoice in the Lord.” This is the OT version of Phil. 4:11–13. Habakkuk knew that he had no strength of his own, but that God could give him the strength he would need to go through the trials that lay ahead. “He will make me like a deer—I will jump over the mountains.”

**Book of Zephaniah**

This man is no ordinary preacher. He is the great-great-grandson of King Hezekiah, one of Judah’s most famous rulers. Zephaniah preached during the reign of godly King Josiah. We may divide Zephaniah’s message into three parts, two dealing with judgment and one with mercy.

**God Will Judge Judah (1:1–2:3)**

1. What a statement: “I will utterly destroy everything from off the land.” Judgment is coming and nothing will escape. Yes! How can God destroy His holy people and His holy city? He does it because of their sins, and particularly the sin of idolatry (vv. 4–6). The prophet describes three kinds of sinners in these verses: those who have forsaken Jehovah and who worship only idols, vv. 4–5a; those who worship both Jehovah and the idols, v. 5b; and those who have forsaken the Lord openly and want nothing to do with Him, v. 6.
2. The coming judgment is described in vv. 7–18. He calls it “the Day of the Lord,” a phrase used by several other OT writers, especially Joel. “The Day of the Lord” has a two-fold meaning: (1) God’s judgments on Israel and Judah in the past; (2) prophetically, that future time of judgment when God will pour out His wrath (Rev. 6–19). In this case, “the Day of the Lord” would be the Babylonian invasion in 606 B.C. and the destruction of the city and temple in 586 B.C.
3. The noise of the invasion will start at the fish gate, the farthest gate in the city, and then travel right up to the top of Mt. Zion. But it will not be foreign soldiers doing the work; it will be God searching out the city, as with a lamp, exposing sin and punishing wickedness. Verses 14–16 use eleven different words to describe the coming day of the Lord. Rich and poor alike will suffer; no one’s silver or gold will be able to save him.
4. In 2:1–3 the prophet turns to Jerusalem and Judah and pleads with the people to turn to the Lord and repent of their sins. “Before God’s decree of judgment comes to pass, while there is still time, turn to the Lord and ask for mercy.” Alas, the nation was content to be “religious”; they would not turn from their sins.

**God Will Judge the Nations (2:4–3:7)**

1. The prophet names the various Gentile nations around Judah and announces that God will judge them for their sins as well. They had mistreated God’s people and proudly “magnified themselves”; therefore God would humble them. Their lands would be ruined. Their idols would prove powerless.
2. Again, Zephaniah closes this message with an appeal to his own people (3:1–7). If God judges the sins of the heathen, how much more will He judge the sins of Judah, the “holy nation of God”? He calls Jerusalem filthy and polluted—yet Josiah had removed all the idols. God could see their hearts, and in their hearts He saw rebellion. The priests polluted whatever they touched, including the holy sanctuary. They could see God’s judgment day after day, but they did not take it to heart. They saw Him punish other nations, but they said, “It will never happen here.”

**God Will Restore His People (3:8–20)**

1. Zephaniah closes his message with a great promise: God will one day regather His people, punish the Gentile nations, and restore Israel and Judah to their land. Verse 8 is certainly a prediction of the Battle of Armageddon, when all nations shall gather against Jerusalem in the last days (Rev. 19:11–21). But Jesus Christ will return and judge these nations, and then establish His kingdom. He will regather the scattered Jews, cleanse them of their sins, and establish His righteous kingdom, sitting upon David’s throne in Jerusalem. See Zech. 12–13.
2. Have you noticed Zephaniah’s emphasis on “the remnant”? (2:7, 9; 3:13) In his day, there was a believing remnant, a small group of people faithful to the Lord.
3. What were the believing Jews to do because of Zephaniah’s message? For one thing, they were to wait (3:8) and let God work out His purposes. Then, they were to sing (3:14) and rejoice at the goodness of the Lord. The nation would have to go through a time of trial and testing, but God would be in the midst of her (3:17) and she would not have to fear even in the time of judgment. God would love them and care for them. Then, when His wrath had been ended, He would restore the nation and rejoice over them. He would afflict those who had afflicted the Jews (3:19) and would bring the Jews back to their land. This happened after the seventy years of captivity ended. But there is a future regathering and restoration for Israel when, according to v. 20, they will be a praise to all the earth. That has not happened, yet.