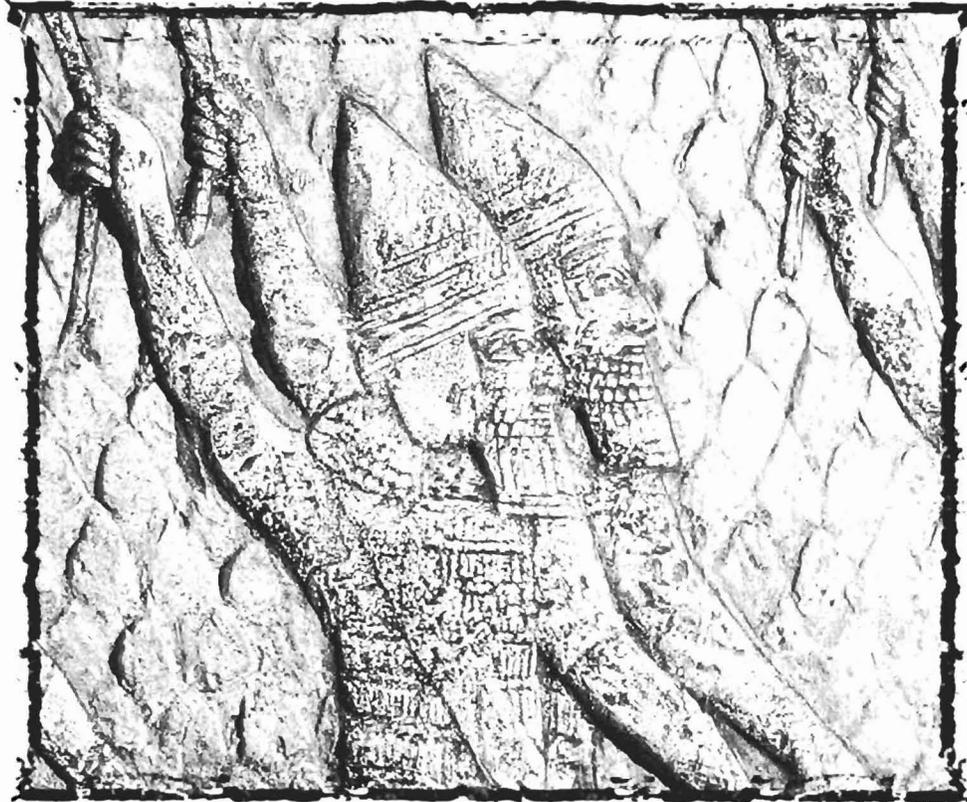


OBADIAH JONAH MICAH NAHUM HABAKKUK



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Assyrian soldiers

This lesson examines the books of Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, and Habakkuk, which are part of the Minor Prophets.

OBADIAH

The first of these five books is Obadiah. It is the shortest book in the Old Testament, having only one chapter. We know nothing about the prophet Obadiah. The opening verse tells us that the book is

a vision of Obadiah, but it gives no historical context and no biographical information. The name *Obadiah* means “servant of Yahweh.” This name was fairly common in ancient Israel. Thirteen Obadiahs appear in the Old Testament.

The Book of Obadiah is primarily a denunciation of the state of Edom. It describes the calamities that the prophet sees befalling the Edomites, who are related to the Israelites. The Edomites traced their lineage back to Esau, the twin brother of

seems to indicate that persons must hold the sentiments of nationalism and those of universalism in tension.

Chapter 2 of Jonah is his prayer to God. Read Jonah 2:4-9, and answer these questions.

a. Jonah fled from God's calling and was cast into the sea. How did he feel about God then?

b. When his soul fainted within him, what did Jonah do?

c. Why did Jonah give thanks to God?

MICAH

When we move to the Book of Micah, we again encounter a prophetic book similar to Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, and Hosea. The opening verse tells us something about the prophet and his historical context. From the introduction, we know that Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah who prophesied during the days of the Assyrian Empire.

Micah is from a small village called Moresheth. In many ways his preaching parallels that of his urban contemporary, Isaiah. Micah says a great deal about the perversion of justice by the leaders of Judah. Read Micah 3:9-11.

In one of the most perceptive passages of the Old Testament, Micah tries to define what religion is all about. He asks whether God will be pleased with sacrifice—even

the sacrifice of one's own child. Read Micah 6:8 for Micah's own answer to his question.

Micah is the first prophet to preach about Jerusalem's destruction. In Micah 3:12 he predicts that Jerusalem will be plowed like a field and become a heap of ruins, and that the Temple mount will become a wooded height.

Christians usually recall one particular passage from Micah. This passage is his prophecy of the coming ruler from the house of David and the town of Bethlehem. Read this prediction in Micah 5:2.

Micah 6:7-8 gives us a simple definition of true religion. Answer the questions after reading these verses.

a. What does God require?

1.

2.

3.

b. With what other things have people thought to please God, but in vain?

1.

2.

3.

4.

NAHUM

The fourth book in this lesson is the Book of Nahum. All three chapters in this book proclaim and celebrate the fall of Nineveh. The city of Nineveh, capital of the Assyrian Empire, fell to invaders in 612 B.C. The Book of Nahum originated shortly before or just after the fall of the city. It was probably preserved in the canon because it graphically depicts the end of one of Judah's great enemies.

Although the celebration of the fall of Nineveh may strike us as odd, we might remember the joyful celebration that occurred in the Western world with the capture of Berlin and the end of World War II. With the fall of Nineveh an oppressive power that had ruled and plundered the Near East for over a century finally came to an end. Assyria's destruction meant others' salvation.

Sense the joy of the news of Nineveh's fall as you read Nahum 1:15.

At the same time, the prophet presents the fall of the city in dramatic detail. Read Nahum 3:1-3.

The subject of the Book of Nahum is the destruction of Nineveh. However, Nahum starts with a description of God who will bring about the fall of the city. Read the following passages, and summarize the main idea about the Lord contained in each.

a. (1:2-3)

b. (1:4-5)

c. (1:6)

d. (1:7)

e. (1:8-10)

HABAKKUK

The final book for today's consideration is the Book of Habakkuk. This prophetic book of three chapters is interesting in that it contains dialogues between the prophet and God. In Habakkuk 1:1-4 the prophet complains to God, who answers him in verses 5 to 11. The prophet then responds to God in Habakkuk 1:12-2:1. God then answers the prophet in Habakkuk 2:2-5.

Habakkuk complains that he cannot understand the events of his day and why things are as they are. The prophet wonders why the Chaldeans, or Babylonians, go on plundering, and God does not intervene. In Habakkuk 1:17 he asks, "Is he then to keep on emptying his net, / and destroying nations without mercy?" God answers the prophet by stating that the end awaits its time.

In 2:6-20 Habakkuk proclaims a number of woes upon various types of sinful behavior—especially the acquisition of extravagant wealth and property and deceitfully acquired gain. The book concludes with a poem or psalm, which is primarily a hymn of praise. Read Habakkuk 3:17-19.

The introduction in Habakkuk 3:1 and

the final line of the last verse suggest that this psalm once existed as an independent writing. Perhaps the prophet offered the psalm in worship, and it was later incorporated into his book.

Read Habakkuk 2:1. Write in your own words what the prophet did before he received the answer to his complaint.

SUMMARY

The books we studied in this lesson are some of the lesser-known books in the Bible. Try to remember at least one fact about each of these books.

- (1) Obadiah denounces the country of Edom.
- (2) Jonah, after being imprisoned within a great fish, proclaims the destruction of Nineveh.
- (3) The prophet Micah, a contemporary of Isaiah, proclaims the defeat of Jerusalem by the Assyrians.
- (4) Nahum celebrates the fall of Nineveh in 612 B.C.
- (5) Habakkuk warns of the impending fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. There are three alternatives for the message of Jonah: a prophet cannot escape his commission; God could save non-Israelites, even Assyrians, if they repent; and Jews must not think of themselves as chosen by God over all others. What do you think is the message of Jonah? If you do not agree with any of these possibilities, what other or others can you suggest?
2. We noted Jonah's prayer in the workbook questions on page 112. Look again at

Jonah 2:4 and 2:8. Discuss what these verses reveal about Jonah's idea of where God was. Do we tend to identify a specific place with the presence of God? Why is or is not such identification appropriate?

3. We studied the memorable passage in Micah 6:6-8. Look at these verses again, noting the seventh verse: "Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, / the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" This is a reference to human sacrifice in the Canaanite religion. See 2 Kings 3:26-27; 21:6; and Leviticus 18:21. That a man would permit the slaughter of his first-born son in an effort to make payment for the sin of his soul is an indication of his sense of the importance of sin. In ancient Israel, sin was a major problem to be redeemed through blood sacrifice. Discuss how this verse provides an insight into the thinking of ancient people about the problem of sin. How do we look upon the problem of sin today?

4. Habakkuk 2:4 states: "Look at the proud! / Their spirit is not right in them, / but *the righteous live by their faith*" (italics added). The last half of the verse is quoted several times in the New Testament. What does the phrase mean to you? Discuss the way the quotation is used in the following passages: Romans 1:16-17; Galatians 3:10-14; and Hebrews 10:32-39.

DAILY READINGS FOR ZEPHANIAH, HAGGAI, ZECHARIAH, AND MALACHI

- Day 1: Zephaniah 1:1-9
Day 2: Zephaniah 3:14-20
Day 3: Haggai 1:1-11
Day 4: Zechariah 1:7-17
Day 5: Zechariah 9:1-10
Day 6: Malachi 1:1-14
Day 7: Malachi 4:1-6