



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

Old Testament Survey

Lesson 35 – The Four Prophets of the Last Days of Judah (Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Jeremiah 1-17)

The Last Days of Judah

God had sent His prophets Amos and Hosea to Israel in the last days before the Assyrian Captivity of Israel in 722 BC. In a similar way He sent His prophets to Judah in the last days before the Babylonian Captivity of Judah in 695, 597, and 586 BC. When Hezekiah was king, Isaiah and Micah had already prophesied this coming Babylonian Captivity. They had also prophesied that God would deliver His exiled people in Babylon and bring them home to the land of Israel. Isaiah had even declared the name of the man who would be the great deliverer: Cyrus the Great of Persia.

To this early testimony of Isaiah and Micah God now added the words of Huldah, the prophetess in Josiah's reign. Hezekiah he sent messengers to Huldah after the Book of the Law was discovered in the Temple. God also added the words of the four writing prophets: Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, and Jeremiah. It was Jeremiah especially who was entrusted with the prophecies of the Babylonian Captivity. It was Jeremiah who prophesied the return of God's people to Jerusalem after 70 years in captivity. This prophecy was fulfilled when Cyrus the Great of Persia permitted the Jews to return to Jerusalem in 535 BC.

Nahum – between 661 and 612 BC

The prophecy of Nahum is similar to that of Obadiah. Obadiah had pronounced God's judgment on the heathen nation of Edom. Nahum pronounced God's judgment on Assyria – particularly on Assyria's capital, Nineveh.

The prophet Jonah had once been sent to Nineveh to pronounce God's judgment on that city. At that time (perhaps around 750 BC) the people repented, and God withdrew His hand of judgment. Their repentance, however, was not permanent. The great Assyrian emperors became noted for their cruelty, and the Assyrians did not start worshipping the true God. Nahum told Nineveh that God's patience had come to an end. Nahum's prophecy was fulfilled in 612 BC when the Babylonians captured Nineveh. The power of the Assyrian empire was broken completely by Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon in the great battle of Carchemish in 605 BC.

The Assyrians were so cruel that everyone was happy when their power was destroyed.

Nahum refers to the destruction of Thebes (No) in Egypt which took place in 661 BC. He says Nineveh will be destroyed just as Thebes was destroyed.

Read at least one chapter from Nahum. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to ask them.

1. The LORD is ready to destroy Nineveh (Chapter 1).

“The LORD will take vengeance on His adversaries” (v. ___)

“The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and He knows those who trust in Him”
(v. ___)

2. Nineveh's destruction will be complete (Chapter 2).
3. Nineveh's sins have brought about its destruction (Chapter 3).

The manner in which Nineveh fell in 612 BC was just as Nahum predicted. He said that the gates of the river were opened. He saw this in a vision of the coming destruction. The evidence indicates that this is the exact way the city wall was broken down, by a burst of water coming from a dammed-up reservoir.

Zephaniah – from 640 to 609 BC

The prophet Zephaniah proclaimed God's judgments on Judah at the time of King Josiah. His message was similar to the message of the prophetess Huldah.

Read at least one chapter from Zephaniah. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to ask them.

4. The day of the LORD's judgment is at hand (Chapter 1).

"The great day of the LORD is near... That day is a day of wrath" (vv. _____)

An ancient Christian hymn, "Day of Wrath" (*Dies Irae*) is based on these words of prophecy.

5. Zephaniah calls Judah to repentance (2:1-3).

"Before the day of the LORD's anger comes upon you, seek the LORD" (vv. _____)

6. God's judgment will also strike Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Ethiopia, Assyria (2:4-15).

He, like Nahum, also prophesied the destruction of Nineveh.

7. God repeats His judgment on Judah (3:1-7).

"She has not trusted in the LORD, she has not drawn near to her God" (v. _____)

8. Zephaniah prophesies the salvation of the faithful remnant of Judah (3:8-20).

"The LORD has taken away your judgments, He has cast out your enemy" (v. _____)

Habakkuk – from 625 to 603 BC

The book of the prophet Habakkuk is a sort of conversation between God and His prophet. Habakkuk complains about God's ways, and God answers his complaints. Habakkuk cannot understand how God can permit the wicked Babylonians to conquer Judah. But God is just in all His ways, and Habakkuk finally realizes this by singing praises to God.

Habakkuk's phrase **"The just shall live by his faith"** is quoted by the apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans. Justification by faith rather than by works was a Bible teaching already in Old Testament times. This teaching came to the forefront in the days of the Lutheran Reformation.

Read at least one chapter from Habakkuk. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to ask them.

9. Habakkuk complains because God does not deliver him from Judah's wickedness (1:1-4).

10. God answers that He will send the Babylonians as judgment (1:5-11).

"For indeed I am raising up the Chaldeans, a bitter and hasty nation" (v. _____)

11. Habakkuk complains about this answer from God (1:12-17).

"Why do You...hold Your tongue when the wicked devours a person more righteous than he?"
(v. _____)

12. Habakkuk waits for God's answer (2:1).

13. God says deliverance will come in His own time (2:2-3).

14. God answers: The Babylonians will finally perish, but the just will be saved by his faith (2:4-20).

"Behold the proud, his soul is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith" (v. _____)

“The cup of the LORD’s right hand will be turned against you” (v. ____

“The LORD is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him” (v. ____

15. Habakkuk thanks God for this revelation and concludes his prayer with a song of joy (Chapter 3).

“Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation” (v. ____

Jeremiah – from 626 to 580 BC

Jeremiah is often called the weeping prophet because he wept at Judah’s wickedness and the judgments of God that fell on His people, His city, and the Temple in Jerusalem.

King Josiah began to carry out his policy of reformation in 627 BC. He attempted to get rid of the idolatry of his godless fathers and restore the worship of the LORD according to God’s Law. At this time, God called the young man Jeremiah to be His prophet. No doubt Jeremiah was a big help to King Josiah in his work of reformation.

In this lesson we consider those prophecies of Jeremiah that he spoke during the reign of Josiah. In the next lesson we shall consider the later life of Jeremiah under the last wicked kings of Judah and all the suffering he had to go through as a prophet of the LORD.

Read at least five chapters of the book of Jeremiah. If you have any questions, don’t hesitate to ask them.

16. Young Jeremiah is called to be God’s prophet (1:1-10).

Jeremiah said: **“Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a youth”** (v. ____

God said: **“Behold I have put My words in your mouth”** (v. ____

17. God announces the destruction of Judah from the north (the Babylonians) (1:11-16).

18. God promises to deliver Jeremiah from the coming persecutions (1:17-19).

“They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you.” (v. ____

19. Jeremiah speaks of Judah’s wickedness and the coming doom (Chapters 2-6).

“They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns – broken cisterns that can hold no water” (2:____

Jeremiah compares Judah to a wife that is unfaithful to her loving husband. Judah is thus guilty of spiritual adultery, that is, idolatry, worship of other gods.

“Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No, they were not at all ashamed; nor did they know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall” (6:____

20. Jeremiah calls on the people to repent of their hypocrisies (Chapters 7-10).

They put their trust in the fact that God’s Temple was among the while they continued to live in their sins.

“They have healed the hurt of the daughter of My people slightly, saying, ‘Peace, peace!’ when there is no peace” (8:____

21. Jeremiah shows how the people have broken their covenant with the LORD (Chapters 11-12).

22. The LORD teaches Jeremiah by means of a worthless linen sash (13:1-11).

23. Jeremiah pronounces God’s judgment on His stubborn impenitent people (13:12 – 15:21).

24. Jeremiah is forbidden to marry as a sign of God’s judgment (16:1-9).

25. Jeremiah pronounces God's judgments on the people, because they have forsaken the LORD (16:10 – 17:27).

“Cursed is the man who trusts in man... Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD” (17:_____)

Questions

1. What bad news did God bring through His prophets in this section?
2. Against whom did Nahum prophesy?
3. Find, if you can, a comforting Gospel message in the words of Nahum.
4. Why is the day of the Lord a day of wrath for very many people?
5. Find, if you can, a comforting Gospel message in the words of Zephaniah.
6. What was Habakkuk's complaint against the Lord?
7. What is meant by the words: “The just shall live by his faith”?
8. Why is it proper to praise the Lord even when there are no crops and no food?
9. What promise did God make to Jeremiah when He called him to be His prophet?
10. What judgment did God send on His people in the days of Jeremiah?
11. In what were the people of Judah putting their trust, rather than God?
12. Why is it so important to know how to blush?