

Bible Study # 73
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Mr. John Ogwyn

Minor Prophets Series—Micah, Nahum,
Habakkuk and Zephaniah

We are getting into several of the Minor Prophets this evening. These are all short books and yet they are books that have a lot of meaning packed into them. We **are going to cover four books this evening—Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah.** Most of them are short. Micah is the longest of the four and it is the one that we will spend the most amount of time on. Micah was written at a time roughly contemporary with that of the previous prophets we covered. We have gone through Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah and Jonah. Micah was roughly contemporary with those individuals. Those six prophets, together with Isaiah, were all roughly at the same period of time. They prophesied in the latter years of the dominance of Northern (ten tribes) Israel.

Remember, the ten tribes went into captivity at an earlier time than did the southern tribes. Northern Israel was transported into captivity well over 100 years prior to the tribe of Judah. Certainly there were a few remnants of the northern tribes that escaped the earlier deportation and there were some individuals who came south at the time of King Hezekiah's Passover. The deportation by the Assyrians took place over a period of years, but the bulk of them were transported in bulk over 100 years earlier. And gradually others were transported. There were some small remnants that migrated at a later period of time, but that gets off into another subject.

I would like to read a few comments on **Micah** from the "Introduction to Micah" in the *Soncino Jewish Commentary* because Micah's time greatly paralleled our own 20th century. One of the ways God used Micah and the other prophets was to write of events that mirrored our time, day and age because there was a very strong parallel between the events that went on in the eighth century B.C. and the events that went on in the 20th century. These events set the stage for the same sort of problems. Human nature is such that if you put the same people in the same circumstance, they tend to do the same thing. The reason why there is a repetitive basis to history is because we see over and over the same people getting into the same circumstances and they tend to respond the same way. When we

read the book of Micah, we find the events dealt with our ancestors, the tribes of Israel.

The comments in the *Soncino Jewish Commentary* say: "The eighth century witnessed the emergence in Israel and Judah of a commercial civilization of great material prosperity. Its foundations were laid in the peace and security which Jeroboam II (783-743 B.C.) won for Israel and Uzziah (778-740 B.C.) won for Judah during their long reign."

They each reigned for periods of about 40 years in the early eighth century B.C. Both of their reigns ended about 20 to 25 years prior to the Assyrian invasion. So we are looking at a period of prosperity where Israel reached its height. One thing to understand, and it is sort of an interesting parallel, Israel reached the height of its prosperity only about 25 years before they went into the depths of captivity. It's sort of an interesting point because when people are "riding high," it seems very difficult for them to imagine that life won't always go on that way. They think it's all taken care of and life is always going to go on that way. And that is not reality; that's not the way it is.

It goes on to mention that these kings "extended the borders of their kingdom from Damascus to the Red Sea, from the desert to the Mediterranean, giving the Hebrew states command of all the main trade routes of ancient days. But it was a civilization that displayed all the evils of a society making haste to be rich—greed and covetousness, reckless and unscrupulous competition and a pitiless disregard of the claims of sympathy, charity and brotherly consideration. Extremes of wealth and poverty, which had been impossible in an agricultural society based on the Biblical system of land tenure, were dividing the nation into classes of possessors and dispossessed." It talks about how "the pursuit of commerce encouraged the development of cities and city life. And it was to the city that the landless farmers migrated in search of a livelihood, where wealth, luxury and vice dwelt side by side with poverty, misery and squalor."

That's pretty descriptive of some of our major cities. Wouldn't that be pretty descriptive of a place like New Orleans, New York or for that matter Houston, Dallas or Washington D.C. where wealth, luxury and vice dwell side by side with poverty, misery and squalor.

You have extremes. It talks about how this period of time saw the influx of a great rural migration to cities. Now, that is what has happened in the 20th century. It happened at the

beginning of the century for the nation as a whole. For most of the South, it did not happen until after World War II. Most of our cities didn't really begin to "take off" until the aftermath of World War II. Since World War II, the South has undergone the urbanization that the rest of the country had undergone half a century or more earlier.

So there are problems. **Micah is describing a civilization, a society that in many ways mirror social patterns that we have undergone centuries later. Social problems beget social problems. There are various problems that are dealt with in the book of Micah.** We are going to focus on Micah perhaps a little more than the others. It is a much longer book. Most of the others are short little books, but we are going to focus on them as well.

Micah 1:1, "The word of the Lord that came to Micah of Moresheth in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem." This is concerning all of the tribes of Israel. Samaria and Jerusalem represent the capitals of the northern ten tribes as well as Judah to the south.

Verse 2, "Hear, all you peoples! Listen, O earth, and all that is in it! Let the Lord God be a witness against you, the Lord from His holy temple." Who do we have addressed here? To whom is the book of Micah addressed? It is addressed to the entire earth. So here is a message that has worldwide implication. What is the time setting of the book of Micah? Was he primarily writing for his day and time—the eighth century B.C.?

Verses 3–5, "For behold, the Lord is coming out of His place; He will come down and tread on the high places of the earth. The mountains will melt under Him, and the valleys will split like wax before the fire, like waters poured down a steep place. All this is for the transgression of Jacob and for the sins of the house of Israel. What is the transgression of Jacob? Is it not Samaria? And what are the high places of Judah? Are they not Jerusalem?"

We notice here that we are focusing on a time when God is going to come forth—a time when the Messiah is going to come and exercise His government and His rule.

The historical setting is clear because we are told the kings who were ruling during the time that Micah prophesied. Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah were the kings of Judah during the time that Micah prophesied. We are given some insight. Micah prophesied in the very latter part of the time of Northern Israel before they went into

captivity. It talks about the transgression of the house of Jacob and the sins of the house of Israel. This is clearly a reference to the time period prior to Northern Israel's captivity.

Verse 5, "...What is the transgression of Jacob? Is it not Samaria? And what are the high places of Judah? Are they not Jerusalem?" This focuses on the fact that the capital cities epitomized the sins of the nation in the things that were going on there.

Verse 9, "For her wounds are incurable. For it has come to Judah; it has come to the gate of My people, even to Jerusalem."

Micah 2:1-2, "Woe to those who devise iniquity, and work out evil on their beds! At morning light they practice it, because it is in the power of their hand. They covet fields and take them by violence, also houses, and seize them. So they oppress a man and his house, a man and his inheritance."

I want to read a comment from the Jewish translation that brings out a little bit extra.

"Woe to them that devise iniquity and work evil upon their beds for the morning is light, they execute it because it's in the power of their hands. They covet fields and seize them and houses and take them away. They oppress a man in his house, even a man in his heritage. [The comment brought out here is on coveting fields and seizing them.] This reference to seizing them is seizing them by corrupt legal processes, rather than by force. This legalized robbery was more galling and immoral than violent ex-appropriation. Against it there was no defense."

It's talking about individuals who were in power (control) and manipulate that power to get their own way. It is talking about individuals who control the wealth, power and legal resources to sort of manipulate, maneuver and gain their own way. That is a descriptive aspect. You can manipulate things through taxation, through raising and lowering of the discount rates and interest rates. It's a matter of inflation. There are many, many processes.

God indicts many of those who are at the very helm of society for the greed and corruption that have motivated them and the pitiless disregard for fairness and for justice with equity.

In this century, we have seen the destruction of rural communities and rural life in this country. There have been many factors in that. But some factors have certainly included the greed and manipulation by those who are in a position to do such things. And it has brought about extensive consequences for our nation.

Micah 2:1, “Woe to those who devise iniquity, and work out evil on their beds! At morning light they practice it, because it is in the power of their hand.” They go to sleep thinking about how they can take advantage of somebody, how they can manipulate, maneuver and take advantage of somebody. As soon as it gets daylight, they go out and act upon a new scheme.

Verse 6, “‘Do not prattle,’ you say to those who prophesy. So they shall not prophesy to you; they shall not return insult for insult.” KJV, “Prophesy you not, say they to them that prophesy: ‘they shall not prophesy to them, that they shall not take shame.’” They don’t want to hear the truth.

Micah 3:1, “And I said: ‘Hear now, O heads of Jacob, and you rulers of the house of Israel: Is it not for you to know justice?’” Here, again, is an indictment to the house of Israel, not to Judah. It’s not to the Jews of today but to the house of Israel.

These books, such as the book of Micah, only make sense and are only understandable if you understand who is being addressed. That’s one of the reasons why some of the evangelicals and fundamentalists among the Protestants who comment on prophecy do not understand it. They do not understand it because they do not understand the key that unlocks Bible prophecy—which is the identity of Israel. They read Micah and think it is talking about the Jews—that little nation in the Middle East today called Israel. And because that is what they think, they misunderstand and misapply the entire message.

Now, there are prophecies that focus on the state of Israel, and we are going to get into some of those next time. There are interesting things that are coming up in the Middle East right now. There are some very remarkable events. By the way, don’t hold your breath until Secretary of State Baker brings peace in the Middle East. Though I don’t question his good intentions, I think that’s going to prove slightly beyond him.

Verse 2, he indicts them, “‘You who hate good and love evil; who strip the skin from My people, and the flesh from their bones.’” Boy, they’d pick it clean. Here are the leaders who should know right from wrong and should be teaching the people and setting an example. Instead, they are out to pick the carcass clean. They are out to get what they can get. We have had scandal after scandal of people in high places who have been up to something. We had the latest thing (sort of a midnight raid) that the United States Senate made. They waited until

late at night when the reporters and cameras were gone, and then they very quickly came up and voted themselves about a \$25,000 raise. That’s quite a deal! If you want a raise, all you have to do is vote in favor of it. How many companies do you know that all you have to do is get together and vote yourself a raise?

It gets off into another subject.

Verse 8, “But truly I am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord, and of justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin.” The job of God’s work and His true servants filled with the power of the Spirit of God is to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin. So here is a message of repentance for the nation.

Verses 9-11, “Now hear this, you heads of the house of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel, who abhor justice and pervert all equity, who build up Zion with bloodshed and Jerusalem with iniquity: Her heads judge for a bribe, her priests teach for pay, and her prophets divine for money. Yet they lean on the Lord, and say, ‘Is not the Lord among us? No harm can come upon us.’”

Here is a message that is going to shake this nation because it is addressed to the heads of the house of Jacob, to the rulers of the house of Israel who are to be indicted by God’s work, as those who “abhor judgment and pervert all equity, who build up Zion with bloodshed and Jerusalem with iniquity.” They are in it for what they can get. They are in it for the money. You talk about an expose! There are some things that are going to be laid bare.

What do you think is going to happen when this message is delivered by God’s work to the nation? They are going to be glad to see us leave. They will probably help us pack and encourage us to go. That time is going to come. It is going to come in God’s time. God is the one who orchestrates the time. God has reserved the times and the seasons in His own authority (Acts 1:7).

Micah 4 addresses something that is important. It again sets the stage for the time period Micah is describing. Is Micah primarily talking about his own day and his own time?

Micah 4:1, “Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains and shall be exalted above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it.” “In the latter days,” the mountain of the house of the Lord is going to be exalted. God’s government is going to be established in the latter days. Now, if you want

to read another description of it, you can go back to Daniel 2 and Daniel 7.

Daniel 2:44, “And in the days of these [ten] kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed....” The God of heaven is going to step in and set up a kingdom and a government.

Micah 4:1-2, “Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it. Many nations shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.’ For out of Zion the law shall go forth, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.”

Jerusalem is going to be the world capital. It’s not going to be in Washington, New York, Moscow, Rome, Berlin or some other such place. It’s going to be in Jerusalem. After God’s government is established, there are going to be many nations that are going to come and look. They are going to want and be seeking what they see. Israel is going to be re-gathered and begin to blossom and bud as a rose (Isaiah 35:1-2). They will blossom and bud and fill the earth. As Israel begins to prosper, (blossom and bud) the surrounding nations are going to want that. The government of God, within a matter of years, is going to expand out into the entire world. Within a matter of a few years, the entire earth will be brought under the government of God.

Verse 3, “He shall judge between many peoples, and rebuke strong nations afar off....” There are going to be those who come voluntarily and seek to learn of God’s way. They want to know what works. They want the blessings they see. And there are going to be others that sort of have a belligerent, recalcitrant attitude and are going to have to be rebuked, to be dealt with. They are not going to be allowed to abuse their neighbor. They are not going to be allowed to go in and take their neighbor’s property. They are not going to be allowed to learn war any more.

Verse 3, rather, continuing, “...They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nations shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”

Verse 4, “But everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken.”

There are two or three things that come out here. Many times over the years and centuries, there

has been the concept that a utopian society would involve some form of communism or socialism. There have been various utopian schemes that have attempted to be carried out in that way—none of which has ever built an enduring society because you remove the incentive. Some of them have lasted longer than others. Those that have been voluntary, where people have been committed to a cause and pitched in for the common good, lasted for a while. But that’s not the way God will do it.

God is not going to build a communistic or socialistic society in Tomorrow’s World. Every man will sit under his vine and his fig tree, not under the community vine or fig tree. There is that principle. One of the Ten Commandments protects private property—thou shall not steal. That recognizes there are things that could be stolen. Since there is property and there is a right to property, there are many ramifications to that commandment.

We see here a couple of things. “Every man will sit under his own vine and fig tree.” We see that there will be individual possessions; individuals will own property. And we also see that it says, “and none shall make them afraid.” There’s not going to be fear and the things that intimidate people.

It’s interesting. There are so many different ways a society is structured. Just one small way—look at the taxation structure. In ancient Israel, there was no such thing as a property tax. That may seem like a small thing, but over the years there have been farmers who have lost their property, particularly years ago in the aftermath of the War Between the States. There were many of those who lost their farms because they couldn’t pay the taxes. This sort of thing happened.

My grandfather came from Arkansas to Louisiana as a young boy. That’s what had happened to his family. Back in certain times, it has not been an uncommon thing. The whole concept of property tax really means that even though you have a deed to your property, you don’t own your property. It goes back to a feudal concept that the title to all the land ultimately resides with the king and, in effect, you have to pay him rent on it every year. You may not think he does, but just don’t pay it for a few years and you will find out who owns it. It’s a concept of ownership and that ownership ultimately resides in the crown. In this country, since we don’t have a monarch, it resides in the state. And in order to use this property, you have to pay the state a fee every year—a fee that the state assesses. And if you fail to pay it over a period

of time, they can come in and take it away from you.

In ancient Israel, that was not the case. Title of the land ultimately belonged to God. God gave it to individual families and, under God's law, the family could not lose it forever. They could mortgage it. In effect, the most they could do was lease it for 49 years because at the Jubilee it always reverted back to the family. If somebody was a "ne'er-do-well," a spendthrift and not a good manager, he could bankrupt himself, but it wouldn't have implications for generations to come because, in effect, every generation got a fresh start. You had a chance to learn lessons from the past and get a fresh start.

"But everyone shall sit under his vine and fig tree, and none shall make him afraid...." There won't be terrorists or a lot of crime in the streets. Today, sometimes, you would be afraid to sit under your own vine and fig tree unless you had security lights around and maybe put up a big fence. Some people are almost living in a jail. There are bars on their doors and windows because they are afraid of people breaking in, robbing or murdering them. Can you imagine living in a society where "...none shall make you afraid"? You can sit out in the yard and you don't have to fear anyone. The government's not going to come take it away, nobody is going to come and steal it, and no one will do violence to you. This is the sort of society that is being talked about.

Verse 5 (an interesting verse), "For all people walk each in the name of his god, but we will walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever." All the commentators scratch their heads about this verse. They can't understand it. What does this mean? Does it mean that in Tomorrow's World, everybody will worship every god they want to? No, all people will walk in the name of his god. Who is going to be the god of those various people? Well, various members of the God Family—you and me and others. We are going to be assigned as the God-Being who is ruler over this or that community or this or that state. All these people are going to walk in the name of their god.

Verse 5, continuing, '...but we [those of us in God's Family] will walk in the name of the Eternal our God.' They will orient toward us and through us, to Christ and the Father because we will also be part of the Family of God. When we put on immortality at the resurrection, we become a part of the very Family of God. We will be worthy of worship. It says so in Revelation to the Philadelphians.

Revelation 3:9, "Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you." That can only be done to a God-Being.

Revelation 22:8-9, you remember when the Apostle John fell down before the angel, "...I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things. Then he said to me, 'See that you do not do that, for I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.'" He said, 'Don't worship me. I am only an angel; you can't worship me.'

Acts 14:11-15, remember some of these people were worshiping Paul and Barnabas and they said, "Why are you doing these things? We also are men...."

In fact, there is an account of Peter concerning that (Acts 10:25-26). It is a good account to remember. It is good proof that Peter wasn't the first pope because if he had been, he would have said, "Kiss my toe." He didn't tell them to kiss his toe. He told them to stand up.

There is a statue in the Vatican where the big toe is literally worn away because so many people have kissed the toe over the centuries—probably millions of people when you consider how many centuries it's been. They've come in there and have done obeisance to that big black, ebony statue that's supposedly Peter. It's called St. Peter today. When it was originally built, it was called Jupiter Olympus, but they just changed the name. They cut the scepter away and replaced it with a set of keys. They sprinkled a little water on it and said, 'You were Jupiter Olympus, now you are St. Peter,' and everything goes right along.

By the way, if it's not the identical statue that Antiochus Epiphanies set up in the temple that was the abomination that made desolate in ancient times, it's an exact copy. It is very likely that statue is going to be the physical object that will be moved to Jerusalem in the future as the abomination because it was exactly the same thing that Antiochus Epiphanies set up (Daniel 11:31). It's interesting that there is an exact counterpart that is set up there.

Another thing set up in St. Peter's Square is the great obelisk. I am sure many of you have seen pictures of it. That's not just any obelisk. That one was transported from Egypt. That was the ancient obelisk of the sun. It's made direct reference to by way of a prophecy against it. It's an interesting story in history because they did it

centuries ago. It was a mammoth feat to transport that thing across the Mediterranean from Egypt to Italy to bring it up there and set it up. They didn't have any mechanized equipment to do it, but they did it. They went to a lot of trouble to get the exact thing that God singled out that He hated. They went to a lot of trouble to get it, bring it up there, set it up in the middle of St. Peter's Square and say, 'This is great, we have the real thing!' I'll tell you, there are some people that are going to be in for a surprise.

Micah 4:5, "For all people walk each in the name of his god, but we will walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever." This is an important verse.

Verses 6-7, "'In that day,' says the Lord, 'I will assemble the lame, I will gather the outcast and those whom I have afflicted; I will make the lame a remnant, and the outcast a strong nation; so the Lord will reign over them in Mount Zion from now on, even forever.'" It describes the time when the government of God is going to be set up.

Micah 5:2, "'But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be ruler in Israel....'" Here is a direct prophecy of where the Messiah would be born.

This is the verse that the priests and scribes quoted to Herod in the New Testament when the wise men had come to Jerusalem to inquire, Matthew 2:2, "...Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?..."

Verses 3-6, Herod was a little bothered by that because he thought he was king of the Jews. This disturbed him somewhat, and he decided he ought to look into this matter. He called the chief priests and scribes in and demanded of them where the Messiah was to be born. And when he put them on the spot, they told him that it was written in the prophets and quoted Micah 5:2.

Micah 5:2 (latter part), "...whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." In Hebrew, "from everlasting" literally means "from the days of eternity." The Messiah was not simply to be a human being. He was to be God in the flesh. His goings forth has been from of old, from eternity.

Verse 3, "Therefore He shall give them up, until the time that she who is in labor has given birth; [In other words, until the Church is established and prepared.] Then the remnant of His brethren shall return to the children of Israel."

Verse 4, "And He shall stand and feed His flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord His God; and they shall abide,

for now He shall be great to the ends of the earth."

Verses 7-8, he describes events that will take place, "Then the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many peoples, like dew from the Lord, like showers on the grass, that tarry [wait] for no man nor wait [delay] for the sons of men. And the remnant of Jacob shall be among the Gentiles, in the midst of many peoples, like a lion among the beasts of the forest, like a young lion among flocks of sheep, who, if he passes through, both treads down and tears in pieces, and none can deliver."

Here, he is speaking prophetically of the might and the power that the Israelite nations would have.

Verse 9, "Your hand shall be lifted against your adversaries, and all your enemies shall be cut off."

Then God talks about how He would deal with Israel and would ultimately punish them.

Micah 6:1-4, "Hear now what the Lord says: 'Arise, plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice. Hear, O you mountains, the Lord's complaint, and the strong foundations of the earth, for the Lord has a complaint against His people, and He will contend with Israel. O My people, what have I done to you? And how have I wearied you? Testify against Me. For I brought you up from the land of Egypt, I redeemed you from the house of bondage; and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.'"

Verses 6-8, "With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the High God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams or ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?"

What is God after? Is He just after great sacrifices and great ritualistic observances? Can we just go through the motions of religion and God is satisfied and pleased with that? What God wants is *religion from the heart*. God doesn't simply want the outward show and outward manifestation. He doesn't want us to simply go through the motions.

He says, 'What does God require? Three things! Very simple! -To do justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly with your God.' It is interesting if you look at the three. The first—to do justly—

has to do with our own personal conduct. It has to do with what we do. It has to do with our relationship in terms of what we expect of ourselves—that we keep the commandments, that we do justly. The word “justly” could just as easily be rendered “righteousness.” It comes from the Hebrew word “*tsidqah*,” which means “righteous” or “righteousness.” What does God require? He requires us to do righteousness. What is righteousness?

Psalm 119:172, “...all Your commandments are righteousness.” We are to do righteousness. We are to keep the commandments. In terms of our relationship with ourselves, in terms of what we expect of ourselves, we are to obey God.

What about our relationship with our neighbor? We are to love mercy. This has to do with the way we treat others. In our own lives, we are to concentrate on obeying God and doing what God says. We are to do what’s right and just. We are to have an attitude of mercy towards others. We are not to have an attitude of condemnation, gossip, judgment, put-down and all these other things. We are to love mercy.

In our relationship with God, we are to walk humbly with God. We are to see ourselves in proper relationship with God. We are to see ourselves in perspective with God—how we stack up. We are to walk humbly with God because when we see how great God is and how weak and puny we are as human beings, how can we walk any other way than humbly?

You know, Nebuchadnezzar walked before God in pride.

Daniel 4:37, Daniel told him, “...those who walk in pride He is able to abase.” The moral of that story is to not walk before God in pride. Walk humbly with your God. You are to love mercy in terms of your dealings with neighbors. In terms of your expectations of self, you do justly. It is sort of interesting. These three categories focus on *ourselves*, our *neighbor* and *God*—a one-word summation of relationships in each of these categories.

It talks about the greed and corruption of the nation.

Micah 6:10-13, “‘Are there yet the treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked, and the short measure that is an abomination? Shall I count pure those with the wicked balances, and with the bag of deceitful weights? For her rich men are full of violence, her inhabitants have spoken lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their mouth. Therefore I will also make you sick by striking you, by making you desolate because of your sins.’”

Verse 16, “‘For the statutes of Omri are kept; all the works of Ahab’s house are done; and you walk in their counsels....’” Omri was the father of Ahab. Omri is not one whom we tend to focus on very much from a Biblical standpoint. We generally have given more attention to Ahab and Jezebel. Ahab was the son of Omri. Omri was the founder of that dynasty. It was one of the most significant dynasties of the northern ten tribes of ancient Israel. He was the founder of the dynasty and gave his name to it.

In fact, in ancient history, the entire nation of Israel was known by the name of Omri by some people. The Assyrians and the Assyrian monuments of the nation of Israel are called “Bit Khumri” which literally translated means “the house of Omri.” Omri was evidently an individual of renown. He founded a dynasty that came on down for several generations—the most notable of which was Ahab, who married Jezebel.

That term, by the way, on the Assyrian monuments referring to Bit Khumri or Omri is the name that Israel was known by when they went into captivity. That’s where the name “Cimmerians” originates. It is the name that the Celtic peoples were known by. In fact, Langer’s *Encyclopedia of World History* brings out some of that. This was the same name that was used in the Assyrian monuments. That’s why Israel was known by those names when they began to migrate up into Europe.

Micah characterizes society with greed and corruption being rampant.

Micah 7:2-4, “The faithful man has perished from the earth, and there is no one upright among men. They all lie in wait for blood; every man hunts his brother with a net. That they may successfully do evil with both hands—the prince asks for gifts, the judge seeks a bribe, and the great man utters his evil desire; so they scheme together. The best of them is like a brier; the most upright is sharper than a thorn hedge; the day of your watchman and your punishment comes; now shall be their perplexity.”

It describes the corruption, and I think “the judge seeks a bribe and the great man utters his evil desire” is sort of an interesting description. We’ve had some of those things on tape. We’ve had several indictments of recent date—the guys asking for money. That’s exactly what happened. (KJV), “The great man utters his mischievous desire.” I like that description. It is a rather poetic phrase, but it is so apt and descriptive. That is the state of things. God is going to intervene and God is going to have to punish the

nation. We see that the book of Micah focuses on God's punishment of Israel and the things that He will do. It is a major prophetic book. It is one of the longest of the Minor Prophets.

Nahum, on the other hand, has three chapters. Habakkuk has about two and one-half pages; Zephaniah is about the same—two and one-half or three pages. We find three much shorter books.

Nahum was written at a later time. It was written basically after Israel had gone into captivity but before Assyria had been punished. God used the Assyrians to punish Northern Israel, but then He was going to deal with the Assyrians and punish them. **The book of Nahum is a prophecy against Assyria.** Nahum sort of took up the story where Jonah left off. Jonah didn't follow God's instructions and tried to run away. He went the other way, but he got delivered to Nineveh to give his prophecies in such a remarkable way. What he feared came upon him—they repented. Things went on for another 100 years or so. But it doesn't take people long—they gradually forget and drift back into their old ways. So, now, God sends another prophet, Nahum, with a prophecy against Assyria—against Nineveh. The book of Habakkuk and Zephaniah both deal with the events prior to the Chaldean captivity of Judah.

Let's notice briefly the book of Nahum.

Nahum opens with a psalm of God's majesty and then prophesies the fall of Nineveh.

Nahum 1:1, "The burden against Nineveh. [This is where the prophecy is addressed.] The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite."

Verses 2-3, "God is jealous, and the Lord avenges; the Lord avenges and is furious. The Lord will take vengeance on His adversaries, and He reserves wrath for His enemies; The Lord is slow to anger and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked. The Lord has His way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of His feet."

Verses 6-7, it goes on to show, "Who can stand before His indignation? And who can endure the fierceness of His anger? His fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by Him. The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and He knows those who trust in Him." God knows who's who and He knows what's what. You don't have to worry about that. God knows those who trust in Him. When God steps into history—when He intervenes—He knows who His people are and who are not.

We go down and it describes the events that are going to occur.

Nahum 2 talks about the Assyrians.

Nahum 2:3, "The shields of his mighty men are made red, the valiant men are in scarlet. The chariots come with flaming torches in the day of his preparation...."

I am going to read this out of the Jewish translation.

Verses 3-5, "The shield of his mighty men is made red, the valiant men are in scarlet. The chariots are fire of steel in the day of his preparation. The cypress spears are made to quiver. The chariots rush madly in the street, they jostle one another in the broad places. The appearance of them is like torches. They run to and fro like the lightning. He bethinks himself of his worthies. They stumble in their march. They make haste to the wall thereof."

It talks about the events.

Nahum 3:1-3, "Woe to the bloody city! It is all full of lies and robbery. Its victim never departs. The noise of a whip and the noise of rattling wheels, of galloping horses, of clattering chariots! Horsemen charge with bright sword and glittering spear. There is a multitude of slain, a great number of bodies, countless corpses—they stumble over the corpses—"

It describes the pomp, grandeur and all of the great panoply of might—the display of greatness and grandeur. You can almost hear the clanking of metal down the street, the marching of the troops, the glistening, shining reflection off the weapons, the great evidence of war power—the power of great military might that is so impressive. It describes this great Assyrian (modern-day Germany) power, the very head of what will ultimately come to be the beast power. It describes that greatness that is there.

There is an interesting statement that I would call to your attention.

Verse 4, "because of the multitude of the harlotries of the seductive harlot the mistress of sorceries [KJV, "witchcraft"], who sell nations through her harlotries, and families through her sorceries."

The word "witchcraft" (both in the beginning and latter part of the verse) is a word that is derived from the Hebrew word "*kesheph*." This is the word that is used in Malachi 3:5 to translate "sorceries." It is a word that is rendered "*pharmakaia*" or "*pharmakon*" in the Septuagint translation, which is a Greek translation of the Old Testament. In the Hebrew, "*mechashevetz*" refers to one specific aspect of sorcery or witchcraft, which had to do with concocting mind-altering potions. "Pharmakon" or "Pharmakaia" in the Greek language, which is

also rendered “sorcery” in Revelation 18:23, is the word that our modern word “pharmacy” comes from. It has to do with drugs. And specifically in ancient times, there were various poisons and potions, many of which were hallucinogenic or what we would term “mind-altering” narcotics and things of this sort.

Anciently, these things even played a role in various religions. You can read about it. You have to look long and hard, but there are references to it. There are references to the role that hallucinogenic and psychedelic drugs played and the mystical, spiritual visions that were seen as a result of that, particularly, in the oriental religions.

In fact, the *Encyclopedia Britannica* claims that Buddha actually died of an overdose from psychedelic mushrooms. When you look at the size of him, you figure he must have eaten a powerful “passel” of mushrooms. He evidently overdosed on that. He took one last “trip.” Some of the hallucinogens, like LSD, that were made derived from or synthesized from things of this sort.

What I want to call to your attention is this word “*mechashevetz*.” There are different words for sorcery and witchcraft. This word had to do with the aspect of sorcery or witchcraft that had to do with concocting potions, poisonous solutions, hallucinogens and this sort of thing.

Nahum 3:4, when you have that in mind, read, “Because of the multitude of harlotries of the seductive harlots [You can go back and compare that with Revelation 17:2 where it talks about the great false church, how all nations have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication (whoredom).] the mistress of sorceries [or the mistress of drug dealing], who sells nations through her harlotries, and families through her sorceries.” It’s sort of an interesting focus when you compare it with Revelation 17 and 18. I’ll tell you, when all is said and done, we may be shocked and amazed by some of the things we find at the bottom of some of the problems that are going on today.

Verse 5, God says, “Behold, I am against you,” says the Lord of hosts; ‘I will lift your skirts over your face, I will show the nations your nakedness, and the kingdoms your shame.’” In other words, God says the time is going to come when He is going to show to the whole world exactly what’s inside of this whole system. It describes the destruction that is going to come. It describes what God is going to do.

Verse 7, “...Nineveh is laid waste....”

Verses 18-19, “Your shepherds slumber, O king of Assyria; your nobles rest in the dust. Your people are scattered on the mountains, and no one gathers them. Your injury has no healing, your wound is severe. All who hear news of you will clap their hands over you, for upon whom has not your wickedness passed continually?”

Habakkuk sort of goes on from there. It was written at a little later time. It was written perhaps 20 to 30 years after Nahum. We know that Nahum was written prior to the destruction of Nineveh. Some of the commentaries try to date it afterward. That’s because they prophesy the destruction of Nineveh and it’s hard for them to imagine that somebody could have known ahead of time that it was going to be destroyed. And that’s because they don’t really believe that there is a God who knows the end from the beginning and declares it (Isaiah 46:10-11).

Habakkuk is written a little later. He would be contemporary with Jeremiah and Zephaniah. Habakkuk is a very important book; **it deals with the struggle of faith.**

Habakkuk 1:1, “The burden which the prophet Habakkuk saw.” First of all, he looks at things and sees all the sins of the nation of Judah. He sees what’s going on and he says, ‘O God, how can you let this happen? How can it go on? Why don’t you do something? These people deserve judgment.’ Then God says, ‘I’m planning on doing that. I am going to send in the Chaldeans and they are going to really wreak havoc.’

Then Habakkuk looks a little further and says, ‘The Chaldeans are worse than the Jews. How can You let them get by with it?’ In effect—‘How can You let the Jews get by with it?’ God says He is going to send the Chaldeans to punish them. ‘Yeah, but how can You let the Chaldeans get by with it? They are even worse.’ But God says He is going to “get” them, too.

It doesn’t take faith when you see everything going the way it ought to go. Think about that! When you see things the way they ought to be, it doesn’t take faith. You’re not walking by faith; you are walking by sight—you see it. It takes faith when physical evidence contradicts what God says. Then you have to make a choice. Do you believe what God says or do you believe what you see?

That’s why Abraham was the father of the faithful. God said, ‘I am going to make of you a great nation’ (Genesis 17:4). Abraham looked at his 90-year old wife who was barren and, let’s face it, there wasn’t a whole lot of physical evidence to give Abraham a lot of reason to think, ‘Boy, God I can sure understand that. I

certainly see how You are going to make me a great nation.’ He just kind of scratched his head and said, ‘Well, alright Lord, if You say so.’ He believed God. He believed God!

Habakkuk 1:2-4, “O Lord, how long shall I cry, and You will not hear? Even cry out to You, ‘Violence!’ And You will not save. Why do You show me iniquity, and cause me to see trouble? For plundering and violence are before me; there is strife, and contention arises. Therefore the law is powerless, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; therefore perverse judgment proceeds.”

I remember back in 1975, ’76 and ’77 when some of us in the ministry were reading these verses and wondering if they weren’t descriptive of the state of things we saw around us at that time. There were a number of us that discussed some of those things privately. We took great comfort from the book of Habakkuk because it was a message of faith.

Verse 5, “Look among the nations and watch—be utterly astounded! For I will work a work in your days which you would not believe, though it were told you.” ‘I am going to work a work in your days.’ This verse is actually quoted back in Acts 13:41 referring to the work of God.

In the context of Habakkuk 1:5, it is talking about raising up the Chaldeans to punish Judah, but it’s really saying that God will do something. God will step in and intervene in ways that you and I cannot imagine. God will do what He does in ways that you and I would never have imagined.

When God got ready to solve the problems in His work and in His Church back in 1978 and ’79, He did so in ways that we would have never imagined. Some of you in the Church, did you imagine that God was going to do things the way He did? Would you have ever second-guessed the way that God stepped in and solved some of those problems back in ’78 and ’79? It would have been the most far-fetched scenario. I don’t think there was a single one of us in the work that could have imagined that God would have stepped in and done it. I can think of various ones (including evangelists) that I remember discussing some of those things with just, literally, weeks before some of those actions came about—and none of us could imagine. We knew that it was going to happen, but we couldn’t imagine how.

There’s a lesson of faith. God wants us to learn a lesson of faith. God wants us to trust Him and to look to Him. That’s a lesson that we can look back on. Habakkuk looked around and saw the

iniquity in Judah, and said, ‘Lord, how can this be? How can all this go on and nothing happens?’ God said, ‘Look, Habakkuk, I am going to work a work in your day, and you are not going to be able to imagine it.’

Verse 6, “For indeed I am raising up the Chaldeans, a bitter and hasty nation which marches through the breadth of the earth, and possesses dwelling places that are not theirs.” They are going to come in and deal with these things.

Habakkuk 2:2-4, “Then the Lord answered me and said: ‘Write the vision and make it plain on tablets, that he may run who reads it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time; but at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry. Behold the proud, his soul is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith.’”

The point of Habakkuk is not just simply for ancient times. It is for our time.

Verse 3, “For the vision is yet for an appointed time; but at the time of the end it shall speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.”

That’s the message of faith. Just because you don’t see God doing what you think He ought to do, it doesn’t mean He’s not going to do it. Has God retired and gone way off somewhere? We want to put a time limit on God. We pray and ask God for help or deliverance and we want to set a time limit for it. God put time in His own authority (Acts 1:7). The point is that *even though it tarries, wait for it*. It will surely come. The point is *the just shall live by faith*. Whose faith? It’s the faith of Christ in us.

Galatians 2:20 brings that out, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” The just shall live by faith. It is not just any faith. It is not just faith that we work up but the faith of Christ in us.

Habakkuk 2:9, it goes on, “Woe to him who covets evil gain for his house, that he may set his nest on high, that he may be delivered from the power of disaster!” It’s an important principle; you don’t really get ahead by seeking to entrench yourself by wrong methods.

“Him that covets evil gain for his house...set his nest on high.” There are various ones that sought to ensconce themselves. This has been the history of God’s people, both in the physical sense (in Old Testament Israel), as well in the spiritual sense. We experienced some of those

things back in the '70s with certain individuals—one man who thought he had ensconced himself. In fact, more than one man had ensconced themselves pretty well, and when God got ready, He intervened. He dealt with it.

It talks about a time—the time that we look forward to.

Verse 14, “For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.” That’s the time to look forward to. That’s the time of God’s government holding sway on this earth.

Verse 20, “But the Lord is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him.”

Habakkuk 3:2, “O Lord, I have heard your speech and was afraid; O Lord, revive Your work in the midst of the years! In the midst of the years make it known: in wrath remember mercy.”

In Romans, God talks about the time when He will make a short work.

Romans 9:28, “For He will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness, because the Lord will make a short work upon the earth.” The point is that God is going to accomplish what He chooses. He will revive His work in the midst of the years.

God has a plan that He is going to carry out. The book of Habakkuk is very much a book of faith. It was written in the context of the prophet looking around and seeing everything the way it ought not be. His faith was tried. What do you do? He cried out to God and he said, ‘O Lord, how can this be? Here are your people, the nation of Judah, filled with iniquity.’ God says He is going to deal with that. God has a plan. He has a schedule.

The book of **Zephaniah**, which was written about the same time as Habakkuk, is also an interesting book. **It focuses in on the period of the Day of the Lord in prophecy and who is going to be protected.** Habakkuk is in many ways a lesson of faith. It is certainly appropriate for the end time—a time when we will see iniquity, a time when our faith will be tried, a time when there will be all sorts of chaos and confusion around us and we find ourselves in circumstances and many things that we will only be able to go through walking by faith and trusting God. If God’s not in charge, then we are in trouble anyway. We are in a heap of trouble. If God is in charge, then what is there to worry about? We certainly should have an appropriate concern of going to God but, primarily, to stay close to God so that we might come into the category that it talks about in Zephaniah.

The word “Zephaniah” means “the hidden of the Eternal.” The book of Zephaniah focuses in on the Day of the Lord, and who is going to be protected in the Day of the Lord’s wrath. “The hidden of the Eternal.” –In other words, God’s people who are protected and are in a place of protection or place of safety.

Zephaniah 2:3, it talks about that, “Seek the Lord, all you meek of the earth, who have upheld His justice. Seek righteousness; seek humility....” Who is doing that? Well, God’s people, God’s Church. Who is seeking righteousness and meekness? God’s people are enjoined to seek God, to seek righteousness, to see meekness.

Verse 3, continuing, “...It may be that you will be hidden in the day of the Lord’s anger.”

Zephaniah talks about the great Day of the Lord.

Zephaniah 1:14-18, “The great day of the Lord is near; it is near and hastens quickly. The noise of the day of the Lord is bitter; there the mighty men shall cry out. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of devastation and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet and alarm against the fortified cities and against the high towers. I will bring distress upon men, and they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the Lord; their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like refuse. Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the Lord’s wrath....”

Much of Zephaniah talks about the Day of the Lord. It talks about the great Day of the Lord’s wrath. Who’s going to be hidden? Who’s going to be protected?

Revelation 12:14, tie that in with, “But the woman [the Church] was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half time, from the presence of the serpent.”

Revelation 3:10, it says to the Philadelphia Church, “Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial [tribulation] which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.”

It talks here about God’s people being hidden in the day of God’s wrath. Zephaniah deals with the time of God’s wrath. There’s sort of an interesting expression used in Zephaniah. I would call your attention to it.

Zephaniah 1:4, “I will stretch out My hand against Judah, and against all the inhabitants of

Jerusalem. I will cut off every trace of Baal from this place, the names of the idolatrous priests [KJV, “chemarims”] with the pagan priests—”

The KJV simply renders it “chemarim,” which is not a translation of the word. It is the Hebrew word. It is just transliterated into English. The Jewish translation renders it, “I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place and name of the idolatrous priests with the priests.” “Chemarim” was a term that certainly referred to idolatrous priests. But it has sort of an interesting meaning because the word “chemarim” in Hebrew means “black-robed ones.” It was descriptive of the idolatrous priests.

It is interesting. God’s priests (the Levites) who ministered in the sanctuary always wore white robes. Sometimes there were certain colored threads and extra ornaments that went with it, but the basic robe was white. It’s sort of interesting that there are priests of a particular religion that have normally been identified with black garments. Usually, it’s right on down to where there’s just one little tiny strip of white right there at the neck. In ancient times, the priests of Baal and some of the various ones wore black robes. It is the term used here. It means idolatrous priests. But the term that God chose to use for them was “the black-robed ones,” and I think that’s sort of an interesting analogy and an interesting point.

Zephaniah 1:7-8, “Be silent in the presence of the Lord God; for the day of the Lord is at hand, for the Lord has prepared a sacrifice; He has invited His guests. And it shall be, in the day of the Lord’s sacrifice, that I will punish the princes and the king’s children, and all such as are clothed with foreign apparel.”

He’s going to punish people.

Verse 9, ““In the same day I will punish all those who leap over the threshold, who fill their masters’ houses with violence and deceit.””” “Leaping over the threshold” is a pagan superstitious expression.

The expression goes back to an event mentioned in I Samuel 5:4-5. Remember when the Philistines had the Ark of the Covenant they had captured and brought into the temple of Dagon. The next day they came in and the idol of Dagon had fallen down before the Ark of the Covenant. The head of Dagon had broken off on the threshold in the temple of the Philistines. Well, there developed a pagan superstition of jumping over the threshold because stepping on the threshold was bad luck. It’s sort of a superstition that goes back to old Dagon’s head being broken on the threshold. It’s an expression that has to do

with pagan superstition and those who practiced various pagan superstitions.

Zephaniah 1:12, ““And it shall come to pass at that time that I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and punish the men who are settled in complacency, who say in their heart, “the Lord will not do good, nor will He do evil.””” –Those that have sort of a comfortable, laid-back, lukewarm, lackadaisical approach and say, ‘God’s not going to intervene; God’s not going to do anything.’ God says, ‘I am going to search out and find the people who think this and I’m going to deal with them.’

It talks about the events of the Day of the Lord that are going to come.

Verse 18, “Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the Lord’s wrath...”

Zephaniah 2:3 (we have already focused on), “Seek the Lord, all you meek of the earth...”

Isaiah 55:6, “Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near.” It goes on to talk about that sort of thing and the destruction that is going to come on various ones of the people around in the Day of the Lord.

Zephaniah 3:1-5, “Woe to her who is rebellious and polluted, to the oppressing city! She has not obeyed His voice, she has not received correction; she has not trusted in the Lord, she has not drawn near to her God. Her princes in her midst are roaring lions; her judges are evening wolves that leave not a bone till morning. Her prophets are insolent, treacherous people; her priests have polluted the sanctuary, they have done violence to the law. The Lord is righteous, He is in her midst, He will do no unrighteousness. Every morning He brings His justice to light; He never fails, but the unjust knows no shame.”

The indication here is that Jerusalem is being used as a type of not only Judah but, certainly, also all of Israel.

Verse 4, “...They have done violence to the law.” Certainly, in many ways, you could say the Talmud crucified the law. When the scribes and the Pharisees got through with it, they had done violence to God’s law. Christ indicted them pretty severely for that in the time of the New Testament.

Verses 8-10, ““Therefore wait for Me,’ says the Lord, ‘until the day I rise up for plunder; My determination is to gather the nations to My assembly of kingdoms, to pour on them My indignation, all My fierce anger; all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of My jealousy. For then I will restore to the peoples a pure

language, that they all may call on the name of the Lord, to serve Him with one accord. From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia My worshipers, the daughter of My dispersed ones, shall bring My offering.”

God talks about the time when all nations will finally be turned to Him with one pure language. It talks about a time of re-gathering.

Verse 13, “The remnant of Israel shall do no unrighteousness and speak no lies, nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth; for they shall feed their flocks and lie down, and no one shall make them afraid.” That’s not talking about the state of Israel in the Middle East now. That’s talking about Israel brought back after Christ’s return. That’s talking about conversion.

Verses 17-18, “The Lord your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you in His love, He will rejoice over you with singing. I will gather those who sorrow over the appointed assembly....”

God will bring back the captives. There are many prophecies of God’s intervention and the things that God will do as He steps in.

We find that both Habakkuk and Zephaniah are set in the setting of Judah at the time of Jeremiah—a time when God was getting ready to deal with His people Judah. It’s sort of a background to the account of Josiah in the book of Lamentations.

Habakkuk and Zephaniah were contemporary. They were with that particular time period. Micah was much earlier. Nahum was sort of in-between. What we see here are four short books. Three are fairly short. Micah is a little longer. There is a great deal of messages packed in there. There are messages of faith, messages of confidence, the story of God’s intervention and the ultimate establishment of the Government of God to hold sway over all the earth.

Next Bible study we will be covering the books of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi—three books that are all related to after the exile of Judah. Next Bible study will conclude our brief survey with the Minor Prophets. We will come back at a little later time and pick up quite a bit more prophecy in much more detail when we go through the book of Revelation.