

OT SURVEY: PROPHETS

WEEK 3: ZEPHANIAH, HABAKKUK, JEREMIAH

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

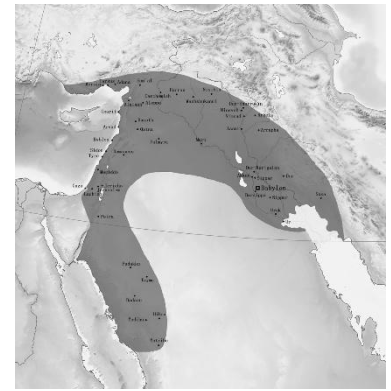
- We are going to take these 6 weeks and work through the Old Testament prophets!
- This will be an overview of the books in their particular group.
- During each teaching, after an overview has been done, we are going to dive into some of the areas of special interest to us and learn more about what was going on in that particular book.
- **There are two goals:** to have a general working knowledge of each of the prophetic books in the Old Testament and to have the confidence to be able to study them on our own.
- As we study these books, we want to pay special attention to what God is doing through these prophets, how the prophets themselves respond, what the message of the prophets is, and how those being prophesied to respond to their words.

- Jonah, Amos, Hosea, Micah, Isaiah
 - 11/10: The Prophets of the Neo-Assyrian Period (Jonah, Amos and Hosea)
 - 11/17: The Prophets of the Neo-Assyrian Period (Micah and Isaiah)
- Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Jeremiah, Nahum, Ezekiel, Obadiah, Lamentations
 - **11/24: The Prophets of the Neo-Babylonian Period**
 - 12/01: The Prophets of the Neo-Babylonian Period
- Daniel, Haggai, Zechariah, Joel, Malachi
 - 12/08: The Prophets of the Persian Period
 - 12/15: The Prophets of the Persian Period

INTRODUCTION TO THIS PERIOD OF HISTORY

- These three periods are essentially summarized by the dominant power ruling in that day. Judea and Israel were most concerned about *whom?*
- **Neo-Assyrian Period:** Assyria dominated the fertile crescent of Mesopotamia for nearly a thousand years, 1700-727 BC. Assyria captures Samaria and deports the northern kingdom of Israel to Assyria in 722 B.C. (2 Kings 17:6). Jonah is commissioned by God to Nineveh (Assyria's capital) in 760 B.C.

- **Neo Babylonian Period¹:** Babylon rose to power as a powerful city-state and became one of the most powerful empires in history. Babylon as an empire was really only dominant for about a century, 626-539 B.C. Babylon sieged Jerusalem, destroyed Solomon’s Temple, and carried of the southern kingdom of Judea to captivity in Babylon in 586 B.C.



- **Persian Period:** Persia invaded Babylonia from the East in 539, beginning another great empire, just as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Dnaiel all prophesied (Isaiah 13:17-18; Jeremiah 51:28; Daniel 5:30-31). Stretching from Egypt to India, the Persian period highlights how God raises up and tears down kingdoms for his divine purposes. Persia was in instrument of judgment toward wicked nations as well as the means God used to set Israel free from captivity in 538 B.C. under the leadership of Zerubbabel (Ezra 1:1-2). Persia also helped fund the efforts to rebuild the temple.
- As we look at the 7 books of the Bible from this period, we especially want to see the character of God’s people, the consequences of their actions, and the vengeance of the Lord toward the wicked.

Psalm 1:6 ~ For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

OVERVIEW OF ZEPHANIAH

- We know very little about Zephaniah, the prophet.
- His name means “to conceal, hide, treasure, likely a reference to God who protects His people (Ps 27:5; 31:21; 83:4).²
- Written during the reign of King Josiah, the people of Judea were still wicked from the hangover of 2 generations of idolatrous kings (Manasseh and Amon).
- Josiah reigned for 18 years before any reforms really took place (621 B.C.) so between Hezekiah’s death (686 B.C.) and Josiah’s reforms, there were very few who were faithful to God.
- Zephaniah warns against practical atheism, speaks judgment upon Judah and the nations, but gives hope.

¹ Photo: Map of the Neo-Babylonian Empire at its greatest territorial extent, under its final king Nabonidus. Follows the map of the Babylonian Empires produced by National Geographic ([link](#)), with the addition of the various cities conquered by Nabonidus in his Arabian Campaign, based on information in Paul-Alain Beaulieu's *Reign of Nabonidus, King of Babylon (556-539 BC)* (1989), p. 173

² Michael Ufok Udoekpo, “[Zephaniah the Prophet,](#)” ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

The people of Judea:

- Zephaniah describes the people of Judah as a people “who’s hearts were stagnant, and who thought that Yahweh was stagnant too, uninvolved in Judah.

Zephaniah 1:12 ~ “It will come about at that time that I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and I will punish the men who are stagnant in spirit, who say in their hearts, ‘The Lord will not do good or evil!’

- The people are marked by the righteous poor and the proud who were rich. They were shameless (2:1).

Zephaniah 2:1, 3 ~ Gather yourselves together, yes, join together, you nation without shame... Seek the Lord, **all you humble of the earth who have practiced His ordinances**; Seek righteousness, seek humility. Perhaps you will remain hidden on the day of the Lord’s anger.

Zephaniah 3:11 ~ On that day you will feel no shame because of all your deeds by which you have rebelled against Me; for then I will remove from your midst your **proud, arrogant ones, and you will never again be haughty on My holy mountain.**

- They mixed their rituals in the temple with the pagan elements of worship.
- “Take the spirit of a people whose affinities had been with idolatry for time immemorial, add that to the policies of a king [Amon] who indulged pagan religious tastes, and the result is almost intractable.”³

Zephaniah 1:4-5, 9 ~ “So I will stretch out My hand against Judah and against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

And I will eliminate the **remnant of Baal** from this place, *and* the names of the **idolatrous priests** along with the *other* priests. And those **who bow down on the housetops to the heavenly lights**, and those who bow down *and* **swear to the Lord, but also swear by Milcom,**”

- Babylon, like other nations, would have included worship to heavenly elements.
- “One of the earliest known cultures to engage in the **worship of the stars** was ancient Babylon. Babylonian astrology, rooted in the belief that the **gods communicated through celestial bodies**, was heavily intertwined with religious practices and mythological narratives. The Babylonians developed **extensive celestial maps**, recorded astronomical observations meticulously, and **associated specific deities with various celestial phenomena**. The worship of the stars played a central role in Babylonian religion and influenced their societal and governmental affairs.”⁴
- Nabonidus, the king of Babylonia, praying to the Moon, the Sun and Venus (closest planet to the moon).



³ C. Hassell Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 166.

⁴ “Exploring Cultural Beliefs: Worship of the Stars,” Astrozodiacharmony.com, <https://astrozodiacharmony.com/exploring-cultural-beliefs-worship-of-the-stars/>, August 27, 2023.

The Message

1:1-3	Universal Judgment	“I will completely remove all things”
1:4-2:3	Judgment against Judah	“Be silent before the Lord God!”
2:4-7	Judgment against Philistia	“The Word of the Lord is against you”
2:8-11	Judgment against Moab/Ammon	“They have taunted my people and become arrogant”
2:12	Judgment against Ethiopia	“You also... will be slain by My sword”
2:13-15	Judgment against Assyria	“Desolation will be on the threshold”
3:1-7	Judgment against Jerusalem/Judah	“Woe to her who is rebellious and defiled”
3:8	Universal Judgment	“All the earth will be devoured by the fire of My zeal”
3:9	Salvation of the Nations	“I will give to the peoples purified lips”
3:10-20	Salvation of Judah	“They will take refuge in the name of the Lord”

- Moral decay had arisen out of Manasseh’s and Amon’s reign.
- “Early in Josiah’s rule, the prophet began to address the spiritual and political affairs of the time. Zephaniah was in the vanguard of that renewal. He stepped forth to announce the nearness of the Day of the Lord and to offer hope on the remnant that still keep Yahweh’s commandments (2:3).”⁵

The Day of the Lord

- OT: Isaiah 2:12; 13:6, 9; Ezekiel 13:5, 30:3; Joel 1:15, 2:1,11,31; 3:14; Amos 5:18,20; Obadiah 15; Zephaniah 1:7,14; Zechariah 14:1; Malachi 4:5. NT: Acts 2:20; 1 Corinthians 5:5; 2 Corinthians 1:14; 1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:2; 2 Peter 3:10; Revelation 6:17; 16:14.
- His coming is certain, not pleasant for the wicked, for the purpose of wrath and judgment.
- The Day of the Lord is so often described as *near* to invoke urgency and put the reader on the alert. The Lord fulfilled his plans to bring vengeance on nations in near history (Amos 5:18-20; Zephaniah 1:14-15) and he also fulfills his promise to judge the wicked on “a day of “visitation,” and the “great day of God Almighty” (Revelation 16:14) and refers to a still future fulfillment when God’s wrath is poured out on unbelieving Israel (Isaiah 22; Jeremiah 30:1-17; Joel 1-2; Amos 5; Zephaniah 1) and on the unbelieving world (Ezekiel 38–39; Zechariah 14).”⁶
- The Day of the Lord also brings about salvation. He restores Judah through the judgment of other nations and even the nations are predicted to receive the grace of God.

Zephaniah 3:9 ~ For then I will give to the peoples purified lips, that all of them may call on the name of the Lord, to serve Him shoulder to shoulder.

⁵ Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books*, 171.

⁶ <https://www.gotquestions.org/day-of-the-Lord.html>

Amos 5:18-20 ~ Alas, you who are longing for the day of the Lord, for what purpose *will* the day of the Lord *be* to you? It *will be darkness and not light*; as when a man flees from a lion and a bear meets him, or goes home, leans his hand against the wall and a snake bites him. *Will not the day of the Lord be darkness instead of light, even gloom with no brightness in it?*

Zephaniah 1:14-18 ~ A day of wrath is that day, a day of **trouble and distress**, a day of **destruction and desolation**, a day of **darkness and gloom**, a day of **clouds and thick darkness**, ¹⁶ a day of trumpet and **battle cry** against the fortified cities and the high corner towers. ¹⁷ I will bring **distress** on men so that they will walk like the blind, **because they have sinned against the Lord**; and **their blood will be poured out like dust** and their flesh like dung. ¹⁸ Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to deliver them on the day of the Lord's wrath; and all the earth will be **devoured** in the **fire of His jealousy**, for **He will make a complete end**, indeed a terrifying one, of all the inhabitants of the earth.

Zephaniah 2:2-3 ~ Before the decree takes effect— the day passes like the chaff— before the burning anger of the Lord comes upon you, before the day of the Lord's anger comes upon you. Seek the Lord, all you humble of the earth who have carried out His ordinances; seek righteousness, seek humility. Perhaps you will be hidden in the day of the Lord's anger.

God's Grace

- Despite the unfaithfulness of His people, God himself will restore a remnant, a faithful portion of the people to honor the Lord (3:12-13).
- God's grace to show the people of Judah favor demands a response!

Zephaniah 3:14-20 ~ Shout for joy O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! The Lord has taken away His judgments against you, He has cleared away your enemies. The King of Israel, the Lord is in your midst; You will fear disaster no more.

- God remained faithful to his people. He is consistent, faithful, and abiding to those who seek the Lord, seek righteousness and humility.
- God provides renown and honor and restores Israel according to His promises.

OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK OF HABAKKUK

- The prophets spoke to Israel about God's demands. Habakkuk spoke to God about Judah's dilemma.
- Habakkuk focused on the current oppression of Judah and the coming judgment at the hands of the Chaldeans (Babylonians).

The Message:

1:1-4	Prayer	“How long must the unjust triumph?”
1:5-11	God’s Answer	“Just is on the way”
1:12-2:1	Prayer	“Is justice like this?”
2:2-5	God’s Answer	“Justice will indeed prevail in my timing”
2:6-20	Woes of Condemnation:	<i>Plunder, greed, violence, drunkenness, idolatry</i>
3:1-2	Prayer	“I have heard the report about You, and I fear”
3:3-15	God’s Answer	“Splendor covers the heavens and the earth is full of His praise”
3:16-19	Confident Exultation	“I will rejoice in the God of my salvation”

Divine Justice

- This book offers us an excellent description of **divine justice**.

Habakkuk 1:2 ~ How long, O Lord, will I call for help, and You will not hear? I cry out to You, “Violence!” Yet You do not save.

Habakkuk 1:5 ~ Look among the nations! Observe! Be astonished! Wonder! Because *I am* doing something in your days— You would not believe if you were told.

Habakkuk 1:12 ~ Are You not **from everlasting, O Lord, my God, my Holy One**? We will not die. **You, O Lord, have appointed them to judge; and You, O Rock, have established them to correct.**

- God raises up nations to judge His people with *even a nation more wicked than Judah*.

The Foolishness of Idolatry

- People are caught in idolatry and they foolishly pursue vain gods.

Habakkuk 1:15-16 ~ “Why have You made men like the fish of the sea, like creeping things without a ruler over them? 15 *The Chaldeans* bring all of them up with a hook, **drag them away with their net**, and gather them together **in their fishing net**. Therefore they rejoice and are glad. 16 Therefore **they offer a sacrifice to their net** and **burn incense to their fishing net**; because **through these things their catch is large**, and their food is plentiful.

- “The nation that had piled success upon success, catching men and women like fish in its net, had shown its dullness of spiritual insight by offering sacrifice to that net (1:16). The absurd limits of idolatry were evident among the Chaldeans.”⁷
- The nets of idolatry swallow many people today and God provides the answer that we need:

Habakkuk 2:18-20 ~ “What profit is the idol when its maker has carved it, *or* an image, a teacher of falsehood? For *its* maker trusts in his *own* handiwork when he fashions **speechless** idols. 19 “Woe to him who says to a *piece of wood*, ‘Awake!’ To a **mute**

⁷ Bullock, 183.

stone, 'Arise!' And that is *your* teacher? Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver, and there is **no breath** at all inside it. 20 "But the Lord is in His holy temple. **Let all the earth be silent before Him.**"

OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

- Jeremiah is a book written to show that the judgment of Judah is coming. He exhorted the people to repentance and obedience to God's word. Jeremiah warned, exhorted, pleaded, and wept over his people.
- He accurately predicted the destruction of Jerusalem and 70-year exile by Babylon (20:4-6; 37:6-10; **39:1-2**)
- His ministry for over 40 years largely proclaimed the same message of sin and judgment, alongside repentance and hope for those who would turn to God (25:5-7).

The Message:

1:1-25:13	Book One: Against Judah and Her Kings
26:1-29:32	Jeremiah's Trial and Battle against False Prophets
30:1-31:40	Book Two: Promise of Restoration
32:1-45:5	Jeremiah's Turmoil and Prophecy Against Those Who Remained in Jerusalem After Exile.
46:1-51:64	Book Three: Against the Nations
52:1-24	Historical Conclusion

Prophetic Communication

- Speaking. 1:7 ~ And all that I command you, you shall speak.
- Writing. 36:2 ~ Take a scroll and write on it all the words which I have spoken to you concerning Israel and concerning Judah, and concerning all the nations...
- Prophetic Symbolism with definition given by God: Linen Waistcloth (ch 13), the potter's house (ch 18), the broken jar (ch 19), the bond and yokes (ch 27-28), field (ch 32). They were always accompanied by interpretation.

Faithful Proclamation

Jeremiah 1:16-19 ~ "I will pronounce My judgments on them concerning all their **wickedness**, whereby they have forsaken Me and have offered sacrifices to **other gods**, and worshiped the works of their own hands. 17 "Now, gird up your loins and arise, and **speak to them all which I command you. Do not be dismayed before them**, or I will dismay you before them. 18 "Now behold, I have made you today as a fortified city and as a pillar of iron and as walls of bronze against the whole land, to the kings of Judah, to its princes, to its priests and to the people of the land. 19 "**They will fight against you**, but they will not overcome you, for I am with you to deliver you," declares the Lord.

- Jeremiah is a premiere example of a faithful minister of God, yet these are the "results" of his ministry:
 - He was commanded not to marry. "You shall not take a wife for yourself nor have sons or daughters" (16:1-4).
 - In his ministry to Judah, he lived he called people to repentance to avoid God's judgment (ch 7, 26, but was not listened to:

Jeremiah 25:3 ~ "these twenty three years the word of the Lord has come to me and I have spoken to you again and again, but you have not listened"

- He was treated poorly by family (12:6)
 - He was beaten and put in stocks (20:1-2)
 - He was mocked and reproached and derided (20:7)
 - Like Job, he was very discouraged, weeping often, regretting his difficult life (20:14-18)
 - He was put on trial for his life (26:11)
 - King Jehoiakim took his scrolls of prophecy, cut up them apart and burned them (36:23).
 - He was forced to flee from King Jehoiakim (36:26)
 - He was falsely arrested and beaten as a traitor (37:13-16)
 - He was thrown into a pit of mud (38:6).
 - He was publicly humiliated by a false prophet (43:2)
- “Yet through all the hardship and humiliation he was forced to endure, Jeremiah **remained obedient and faithful to God**. Although at first he questioned God’s calling, once he accepted his position he became a **model of perseverance and devotion**. After enduring decades of abuse, threats, and outright indifference, Jeremiah could easily have turned his back and walked away. But he knew that was exactly the problem God had told him to warn the people about. The people had turned away from God’s will, and Jeremiah was not about to do the same. Some may look back at his ministry and consider it a failure because the people did not respond to his call. In reality, his life was a glorious success because Jeremiah remained faithful to his God.”⁸
 - He may not have seen immediate results, but his struggle to obey God in a world that had turned wholesale away from its Creator has inspired generations of believers to faithfully endure, and obey the Lord.

God’s Sovereign Purposes

- His calling 1:5
- God’s determination to punish Judah (27:8)
- Implications for today:
 - Sorrow (Chapter 2:11-13; 13:17; 14:17; Chapter 31)
 - Pride (Chapter 13)
 - Boasting (Chapter 7)
 - Dedication to God and our Wandering Heart (2:1-3:5)
 - God’s judgment (Chapters 2 and 3)
 - The Human Heart and Need for God to Save (Chapter 17)
 - Persecution (Chapter 20)
 - The Messiah as king over all people (Chapter 23; 31; 33)
 - Idolatry (Chapter 10)
 - Preservation of Scripture (Chapter 36)
 - Bad Leadership of God’s People (Chapter 23 and 25)
 - Wickedness used by God to serve his righteous purposes (25:9; 43:10)
 - God’s Word is a judgment to the disobedient as FIRE or a HAMMER (5:14; 20:9; 23:29)
 - God’s gracious invitation to the faithless to turn to him:

Jeremiah 3:12-13a ~ ‘Return, faithless Israel,’ declares the Lord; ‘I will not look upon you in anger. For I am gracious,’ declares the Lord; ‘I will not be angry forever. ¹³ ‘Only acknowledge your iniquity, that you have transgressed against the Lord your God...

⁸ Thomas Nelson Bibles, “Jeremiah’s Faith,” <https://www.thomasnelsonbibles.com/blog/jeremiahs-faith/>, Marh 14, 2017.