

Introduction to Zephaniah

Author and Date

Zephaniah prophesied during the reign of Josiah (640–609 BC), a Judean king who sought to reestablish acceptable worship practices ([2 Kings 22:1–23:30](#)).

The Gospel in Zephaniah

The prophetic books of the Old Testament are in the Bible to say the same thing to us over and over: people are rebellious, even God's people, but God himself insists on doing his people eternal good anyway. That is what one prophet after another is trying to drive into our heads and hearts. And because rebellious people are unable to work their way out of their waywardness, God will take matters into his own hand to secure their deliverance.

Zephaniah follows this familiar pattern. The book begins with a declaration of the judgment that is coming on God's people and on God's enemies, but by the end of the book we see assurances of God's saving love that might seem to contradict his earlier declarations of judgment. How can God treat his people mercifully when justice calls for requisite judgment?

The final answer to this dilemma is not fully given in the Old Testament, though the entire Old Testament is a snowballing anticipation of the answer. God's justice and mercy resolve only in the life, death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus Christ. On the cross, God's perfect justice is satisfied; but at the same time, his infinite mercy is displayed. Christ died not for his own sins but for the sins of his people, for all who trust in him. But that plan is not fully revealed at every point in the Old Testament prophecies. The book of [Zephaniah](#) joins other Old Testament prophetic books in heightening our suspense and causing us to sit on the edge of our seats, wondering how God will be gracious to his people when they deserve to be forsaken. Yet what is shadowy in the Old Testament comes into the clear light of day in the New Testament: God's own Son was forsaken so that we never will be.

Zephaniah Outline

- Judgment on God's People ([1:1–6](#))
- The Day of the Lord ([1:7–18](#))
- Judgment on God's Enemies ([2:1–3:8](#))
- Final Restoration ([3:9–20](#))

Introduction to Nahum

Author and Date

Nahum is a series of judgment oracles and taunts against the Assyrian Empire and its capital city of Nineveh, given by God in a vision to the prophet Nahum, whose name means “comfort.” The prophecies were made sometime between 660–630 BC from Elkosh, an unidentified locale in the southern kingdom of Judah.

Audience

Nineveh, capital of the Assyrian Empire, is the explicit audience of Nahum’s announcement of God’s impending judgment. The regional superpower of the eighth century, Assyria had been used by God to chasten the unfaithful northern kingdom of Israel, resulting in the exile and captivity of 722 BC ([2 Kings 17](#)). Nineveh had repented from its wickedness several years before Nahum through the warnings of Jonah, but this repentance was short-lived as Assyria added abuse to God’s purpose for his just chastisement of Israel ([Zech. 1:15](#)) and exhibited the characteristic hubris of great earthly empires.

But Nahum is a prophet of Israel, and his prophecies are part of Israel’s Scriptures. The *implicit* audience is the people of God, those already in exile or afraid they would be soon. “Overhearing” God’s warning to Nineveh would have comforted those doubting God’s power, justice, or faithfulness as well as providing hope that oppression would end.

The Gospel in Nahum

In a variety of ways, the prophecy of Nahum brings home the gospel and carries along the redemptive story that culminates in Jesus Christ.

First, there are explicit gospel promises in Nahum—promises of good news and peace ([1:15](#)) and an end to the Lord’s discipline (v. [12](#)) and to the power of the oppressors (v. [13](#)). God is a stronghold and refuge for those in trouble (v. [7](#)). God’s saving character is made clear at numerous points.

Second, as God’s excellencies are proclaimed in judgment ([1:2-7](#)), the repentant hear and receive grace. Even though Nahum does not explicitly call Nineveh to repent, repentance is always in order even if hope is not explicit (cf. [Jer. 18:7-10](#)). An oracle of judgment is a means of grace to the listening believer ([Heb. 4:11; 6:1-8](#)), and of gospel proclamation. Truth is being spoken. This is one manifestation of God’s goodness to humanity.

Week 5: Oct. 18-23 2020

Weekly Overview

Third, we are comforted in knowing that judgment upon wickedness will inevitably come. All will be set right. We can be hopeful and patient. The gospel frees us not only from God's just claims against us but from the dominion of the world, the flesh, and the Devil. In saving, God overthrows and destroys dominions that are opposed to his rule and oppress his people. This is why Jesus Christ would lift up some and overthrow others ([Luke 2:34](#)), feed some and send others away ([Luke 1:53](#)). The good news is not good news for all. In his death and resurrection, Jesus brings an end to empires and puts to shame the powers who oppress ([Psalm 2](#); [Luke 20:43](#); [John 12:31](#); [Col. 2:14-15](#); [Heb. 10:13](#)).

Fourth, and supremely, our focus is drawn to the severity of judgment that Jesus Christ bore for us in his suffering in our place. The taunts deserved by evil ([Nah. 3:5-7](#)) were ultimately borne by him ([Ps. 22:7](#); [Luke 23:37](#)). But for his extravagant act of mercy, our fate would be the same as Nineveh. Instead, we now stand in God's presence blameless, with great joy ([Jude 24](#)). The whole Bible is about the grace of God ultimately revealed in Jesus ([Luke 24:27, 44](#); [John 5:39, 46](#)). The whole Bible is about the gospel ([Rom. 1:1-2](#); [1 Pet. 1:10-12](#)). That includes Nahum. Reading Nahum, we see the judgment to fall on the wicked, and the trajectory that culminates in Jesus continues—a trajectory that clarifies how any wicked person can be fully and freely forgiven.

Nahum Outline

- Introduction ([1:1](#))
- A [Song](#) of Praise to God the Divine Warrior ([1:2-11](#))
- Good News for the Afflicted ([1:12-15](#))
- God's March against the Oppressor ([2:1-13](#))
- A Song of Woe toward the Doomed City ([3:1-17](#))
- The Calm after the Storm ([3:18-19](#))

Introduction to Habakkuk

Author and Date

Habakkuk is unusual as a prophetic book. It never addresses the people of Judah directly. Rather it is a dialogue between the prophet and God. The prophet Habakkuk was probably a contemporary of Zephaniah and Jeremiah. He probably prophesied no later than the end of Josiah's reign (640–609 BC).

The Gospel in Habakkuk

Like the book of [Job](#), this book presents important gospel truths for people who encounter difficulties that seem incomprehensible. Like many of us today, the prophet Habakkuk asked God two fundamental questions amid God's apparent absence and the world's growing animosity toward God's people: (1) Where are you? (2) Why are you doing this? As this man of God observed the chaos of idolatry and immorality that was consuming those who ought to know better, he cried out in two complaints, beseeching God to act with justice against evildoers and to provide mercy for those who were faithful to God.

God responds to both of these complaints in ways that shock and surprise the prophet. First, God declares he will use an enemy nation (Babylon) to bring justice to the evildoers in Judah. Second, God will reveal to Israel his unsearchable wisdom and providence by judging not just Judah but all his enemies. This message finally instills in the prophet a deepened, resilient faith amid perplexing bewilderment.

The gospel shines forth in these themes of justice, mercy, wisdom, and providential provision. Whereas God seemed absent and inactive amid Habakkuk's doubt and distress, this book fits within the context of the Bible's larger story that, in the fullness of time, God himself, through the person and work of Jesus Christ, would come in the flesh to bring justice and mercy for all ([Luke 24:27, 44](#); [John 5:39, 46](#); [1 Pet. 1:10–12](#)). At the cross, Jesus receives justice for *our* sins of idolatry and immorality. Moreover, at the cross, Jesus secures the mercy of forgiveness to all who trust in his substitutionary work. Thus it is on the cross at Calvary that justice and mercy meet.

This gospel shines forth in [Habakkuk](#), as the prophet recounts God's faithful deliverance of Israel during the wilderness wanderings and calls God's people to renewed faith in his provision. As Israel experienced deliverance from Egypt and establishment in the Promised Land, so also Christ's followers today experience a much greater deliverance, a deliverance toward which every earthly Old Testament deliverance pointed—deliverance from sin, with the promise of a heavenly home. The New Testament proclaims the good news that in God's wise and purposeful

providence, God himself has come in Jesus Christ to deliver his people from the bondage of sin through the life, death, and resurrection of his Son.

The gospel response that the prophet finally realized and that every generation must discover afresh is this: the righteous live by faith ([Hab. 2:4](#)). Habakkuk helps us get there.

Habakkuk Outline

- Superscription ([1:1](#))
- First Cycle ([1:2-11](#))
 - Habakkuk's lament ([1:2-4](#))
 - God's response ([1:5-11](#))
- Second Cycle ([1:12-2:20](#))
 - Habakkuk's lament ([1:12-2:1](#))
 - God's response ([2:2-20](#))
- Habakkuk's Prayer ([3:1-19](#))

Introduction to Jeremiah

Author and Date

Jeremiah was called to be a prophet c. 627 BC, when he was young ([1:6](#)). He served for more than 40 years ([1:2-3](#)). Jeremiah had a difficult life. His messages of repentance, delivered at the temple, were not well received ([7:1-8:3](#); [26:1-11](#)). His hometown plotted against him ([11:18-23](#)), and he endured much persecution ([20:1-6](#); [37:11-38:13](#); [43:1-7](#)). Though the book does not reveal the time or place of Jeremiah's death, he probably died in Egypt, where he was taken by his countrymen against his will after the fall of Jerusalem ([43:1-7](#)).

The Gospel in Jeremiah

"Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world" ([Heb. 1:1-2](#)). To understand the gospel in [Jeremiah](#) we need to see his book in the context of redemptive history. Jeremiah plays a strategic role in God's revelation of his purposes that will be fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

From the beginning and up to the first part of Solomon's rule, we can summarize the main elements of redemptive history thus: creation and fall; the covenant with Abraham; redemption from captivity; the Sinai covenant; entry into and possession of the Promised Land; the Davidic kingship; the temple in Jerusalem. As history unfolds, these elements build a comprehensive picture that foreshadows the kingdom of God and the way into it through redemption in Christ. But following Solomon's defection ([1 Kings 11](#)), idolatry and covenant breaking lead to a period of decline for Israel. Despite some valiant attempts to reform by kings such as Hezekiah and Josiah, this process of decline is irreversible and ends with the ultimate destruction of all the visible elements of Israel's covenant relationship with God, such as Jerusalem and the temple.

Jeremiah prophesies in the final stages of this terrible period of decline. He declares the coming destruction of all the visible, tangible evidences of God's presence with the people: the land, the city, the temple, the throne of David. In common with nearly all the Old Testament prophets, Jeremiah had three main points to his message:

- God's people (in this case, those in Judah) have sinned grievously against the Lord.
- The Lord will judge his people for their sin, in this case through the onslaught of the Babylonians.
- Yet God is both unfailingly faithful and bountifully merciful and will bring restoration and salvation.

In various ways the writing prophets, as they prophesy concerning the restoration of Israel and Judah, gather up and repeat all the elements of God's kingdom and redemption that have been revealed in the history of God's people from the beginning up to the glories of Solomon's kingdom. They see this renewal as a future event that some prophets refer to as occurring on the "day of the Lord." Thus, the prophetic view of the future salvation is that it repeats (recapitulates) the pattern of events that has already been revealed. The difference of this future salvation from past patterns of restoration is that the prophets see this coming renewal as being perfect, glorious, and forever.

Of course, no such renewal took place in Old Testament times. Such restoration would dawn only when Jesus of Nazareth came into Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" ([Mark 1:14-15](#)). The New Testament picks up the great themes of Old Testament redemptive history and sees them fulfilled in and through the person and work of Jesus.

We should not be put off by Jeremiah's reputation as the gloomy or "weeping" prophet. He has much encouragement to offer the faithful. To be sure, he is remarkable for the way he reveals his feelings and the torment of his soul. This is not surprising given the nature of his message and the constant opposition by most of his fellow Israelites. Yet, even his experience of this sadness and his suffering are a foreshadowing of the anguish of Jesus as he faces even more harrowing torments, again from fellow Israelites, that lead to his death on the cross.

Redemption comes through pain, not through avoiding it. The gospel is foreshadowed by Jeremiah's message and his personal involvement in it. By his words and suffering he points to the sovereign grace of God in his control over world history and his faithfulness to his covenant that will be fulfilled in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Jeremiah Outline

- Introduction ([1:1-19](#))
- Israel's Covenantal Adultery ([2:1-6:30](#))
- False Religion and an Idolatrous People ([7:1-10:25](#))
- Jeremiah's Struggles with God and Judah ([11:1-20:18](#))
- Jeremiah's Confrontations ([21:1-29:32](#))
- Restoration for Judah and Israel ([30:1-33:26](#))
- God Judges Judah ([34:1-45:5](#))
- God's Judgment on the Nations ([46:1-51:64](#))
- Conclusion: The Fall of Jerusalem ([52:1-34](#))