

“OT Survey: Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah”
(Overview)

I. Nahum.

A. Name.

1. The book takes its name from its author, Nahum (1:1).
2. Who was Nahum?
 - a. His name means “consolation,” “consoler,” or “comfort.”
 - b. He was an Elkoshite, meaning he was from Elkosh: “According to Pseudo-Epiphanius [c. 315-403 AD] it was in Judah near Eleutheropolis. This may be correct, as 1:15 with its reference to Judah may imply that the prophet was from Judah” (Young, 270).

B. Date: “Nahum seems to have exercised his ministry between the time of Assyria’s capture of Thebes (No-ammon, 3:8 – the event is regarded as having already occurred), 664-663 BC under Assurbannipal, and the destruction of Nineveh itself in 612 BC. More precisely than this the date cannot be fixed” (Young, 270).

C. Purpose:

1. “Nahum’s subject is the downfall of Nineveh” (Young, 270).
2. “Along with the prophets Jeremiah, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah, Nahum was a witness to the Southern Kingdom. The Northern Kingdom had been carried into captivity by Assyria almost a century before (722 BC). Now it was in the purpose of God to visit that nation which had been the rod of God’s anger on Israel” (Introduction, 855).
 - a. Jonah’s preaching to Nineveh, which took place between 783-743 BC, brought about a measure of repentance.
 - b. This may have been in preparation for Nineveh’s taking of the Northern Kingdom of Israel into captivity in 722 BC.
 - c. However, God still visited them with judgment for their treatment of His people.

D. Structure:

1. Nahum 1:1-15 The majesty of God and the punishment of His enemies.
2. Nahum 2:1-13 The siege of Nineveh and her destruction.
3. Nahum 3:1-19 Reasons for Nineveh’s downfall.

II. Habakkuk.

A. Name.

1. The book takes its name from its author, Habakkuk (1:1).
2. Who was Habakkuk?
 - a. His name means “embrace.”
 - b. “Jerome stated that the prophet was called ‘The Embracer,’ either because of his love for God or because he wrestled with God” (Introduction, 858).
 - c. The only thing we know about him is what can be determined from the book itself.
 - d. Most importantly, he was a prophet who ministered to Judah before their captivity.

B. Date: “The date of the prophecy [cannot] be determined precisely. However, 1:5, 6 seems to refer to a time just before the Chaldeans came to power. The Chaldeans were in power from 625 to 539-538, hence Habakkuk’s ministry might have taken place under Manasseh. It may be, however, that 1:6 has reference to the Chaldeans as a threat to Judah, and since a threat seemed first to materialize at the battle of Carchemish (605), it has been thought by many that Habakkuk prophesied during the reign of Jehoiakim” (Young, 271).

C. Structure and purpose.

1. “The three short chapters of this little prophecy contain a message of supreme beauty. The prophet begins with a complaint. He has cried out against wickedness and violence, but his cry appears to go unheeded (1:24). In reply to this complaint the Lord speaks. The Lord will not allow the people to go unpunished. He is taking action. He is raising up a people – a bitter and hasty nation – which will punish the people. This nation, the characteristics of which are described in forceful fashion, will serve as God’s instrument in the punishment of His people. However, this nation itself will become presumptuous and will be punished (1:5-11)” (Young, 272).

2. “The prophet then acknowledges the righteousness of the Lord and His purity. However, there yet remains a problem the answer to which he does not see. This enemy nation will indeed punish the people, but it will be punishing those that are more righteous than itself. ‘Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devour the man that is more righteous than he?’ (1:13). Why, asks the prophet, does the Lord, since He is pure, permit this to go on?” (272).
3. “The answer is forthcoming. It is found in the matchless passage: ‘Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith’ (2:4). The thought is that those who are proud, namely, the Chaldeans, have no faith, and therefore are condemned. The only one that will live is the one who has faith. There is thus presented a contrast; it is the contrast between those who have faith (the just) and those who are puffed up with pride. It is the contrast which separates not only the Chaldeans and the elect of Israel, but all mankind, into two classes. The fact that a man is filled with pride is in itself an evidence of his doom. So it was with the Chaldeans; these people were being used of God but they were proud of their accomplishments; they would not, therefore, live. This verse, then, has a primary reference to the situation immediately at hand but it is also very correctly used by the apostle Paul to express the truth that ‘the just shall live by faith’. Essentially, the situation is one and the same, for the life of which Habakkuk speaks is not mere earthly life, but life in the deepest sense, life with God” (272-273).
4. “In light of this profound statement of the prophet we may understand the series of five woes which are pronounced against the enemy nation and also the song of praise (chapter 3)” (273).

III. Zephaniah.

A. Name.

1. The book takes its name from its author, Zephaniah (1:1).
2. Who was Zephaniah?
 - a. His name means “Jehovah has treasured,” or “the Lord hides,” or “the Lord has hidden.”
 - b. “His name indicates confidence in the power of God to hide His worshiper in time of danger” (Introduction, 862).
 - c. “The ancestry of the prophet is traced back four generations to Hizkiah. Since Zephaniah is the only prophet who traces his ancestry back through so many generations, there must be some particular reason, and it may be that this reason is to be found in the thought that Hizkiah and King Hezekiah were one and the same. If this were the case, then Zephaniah is seen to have been of royal ancestry. Zephaniah, therefore, probably had easy access to the royal court to gain a hearing for his message” (Young, 273-274).

B. Date.

1. “According to 1:1 the prophecy was received by Zephaniah during the days of Josiah. While it cannot definitely be determined, nevertheless it is probable that Zephaniah uttered his message at some time before Josiah’s reformation had occurred. From passages such as 1:4-6, 8-9, 12 and 3:1-3 and 7 we learn that the religious and moral condition of the people was very low” (Young, 273).
2. “The first verse of Zephaniah indicates this book is the message which God imparted to the prophet and which the prophet recorded. Though Zephaniah was born during the reign of Manasseh (697-642 BC), he did not assume his prophetic position until the early part of Josiah’s reign, probably 627-626 BC. Presumably the prophecy was written then” (Introduction, 862).
3. “The wicked reigns of Manasseh (697-642 BC) and Amon (642-640 BC) were over. When King Josiah ascended the throne of Judah the apostate conditions which had prevailed for more than one-half century had not yet been challenged. Early in Josiah’s reign (probably c. 627-626 BC), Zephaniah began to warn his people of the impending judgment of God. The fate of Samaria in 722 BC was a solemn reminder of God’s power and justice” (Introduction, 862).

C. Purpose: “Zephaniah’s purpose is to warn the nation of approaching doom. He depicts the day of wrath but also points forward to the coming deliverance” (Young, 274).

D. Structure:

1. Zephaniah 1:2-2:3 The Day of the Lord: Warning of impending judgment.
2. Zephaniah 2:4-15 Judgment on the heathen nations: Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Ethiopia and Assyria (Nineveh).
3. Zephaniah 3:1-20 The sin of Jerusalem and future salvation.