

INTRODUCTION:

The prophets Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah, and the prophetess Huldah all lived in the time immediately before the Babylonian exile, in which Judah is captured and its people carried away into exile. The first three prophets have books in the Bible which bear their names and are grouped among the Minor Prophets. The prophetess Huldah is mentioned only briefly in 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles. What all of these prophets hold in common is that while they proclaimed the Lord’s judgment and punishment upon Judah and the world for its wickedness, they also lifted up God’s call for repentance and our need to be humble, faithful and righteous before God. They testified that God will deliver the humble righteous from destruction. In the case of Huldah, she provided a specific example in that when King Josiah mourned and repented when learning of how God’s people had sinned against God, God rewarded him by allowing him to live out the remainder of his life before God brought forth judgment against His people. In other words, Josiah was spared the wrath that was coming. In this same way, God today is calling us to return to Him in humble and faithful obedience so that we may be spared the wrath which is coming with Christ’s return. The message of these prophets and prophetess are as relevant in our lives today as they were in Judah when they were first heard. God is calling us to live a righteous and faithful life.

BOOK OF NAHUM:

Nahum was from Elkosh, probably in Judah. His name means “consolation” or “full of comfort.” He is mentioned nowhere else in Scripture, with the possible exception of Luke 3:25. He was a contemporary of Jeremiah, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah. We know nothing of the prophet other than this. Two bits of historical information within the book itself help fix the date. Nahum 3:8-10 refers to the capture of Thebes (No-amon), which fell to the Assyrians in 661 B.C., as accomplished fact. Throughout the book the fall of Nineveh is still future. It was subsequently taken in 612 B.C. Considering these two events, most scholars place the date about 620 B.C.

Judah was crying out, “*Has God forsaken Judah? Why do the Assyrians, so full of evil, prosper, while we are suffering? Are God’s promises empty?*” The powerful military state of Assyria, with its great wealth, continually oppressed Judah, almost enslaving her. National life was very precarious, spiritual life was diminishing, and the

nation was continually endangered by marauding bands from Nineveh. Judah was desperate for answers when Nahum thundered on the scene, proclaiming, “*Nineveh will fall! God will save His people!*” In light of Assyria’s great might, the message seemed incredible. Jonah, a century and a half earlier, had denounced Nineveh if it did not repent. The time of repentance was past. The voice of Nahum is harsh and vengeful. Nineveh will pay for ignoring God and oppressing the weak. The message is timeless: Those who arrogantly ignore and resist God will taste His wrath, but those who trust Him will be saved by His love.

The Book of Nahum falls into two parts. Chapter 1 describes the majesty of God; chapters 2 and 3 pronounce judgment upon Nineveh.

Part-1: The prophet enunciates a doctrine of Yahweh forms the basal truth of his prophecy, namely, that God, though slow to anger, yet takes vengeance on His adversaries (1:2-3). Then the prophet describes the majesty and might of the Lord in nature: He is in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of His feet; He rebukes the waters that they dry up and vegetation languishes; the mountains and hills tremble before Him; and the fierceness of his indignation none can withstand. The truth that has been set forth evolves on the goodness of the Lord to His people and His knowledge of them, and on the other hand, the overthrow of evil.

Part-2: A new section of the exalted discourse opens, in which the prophet bases prediction on the truth that has been set forth. He reiterates the impotence of opposition to the Lord: first in the form of a question and next as a declaration, repeating the conclusion of the doctrinal section. Then the prophet foretells the destruction of God’s foes. The prediction of the deliverance of God’s people proceeds, and finally, in view of the truth that has been presented, the prophet exhorts God’s people to continue steadfast and undismayed in His service and worship. Nahum concentrates his prophetic passion, not upon Jerusalem, but upon Nineveh. Relief from the hated oppressor, Assyria, is in sight; the prophet sees the directing hand of God in history. For centuries Assyria had oppressed all the peoples of west Asia. Probably the feeling of despair and suffering that they as well as their neighbors endured helped to develop among the Hebrews the idea of a common humanity. Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah had told their hearers that they would be besieged and carried into captivity; in their inscriptions the Assyrian

kings boasted of their sieges, conquests, and cruelties. Nahum prophesied how retribution would come to Nineveh and mark her end.

(God is Jealous and Avenging)

Nahum 1:2-3a

(2) A jealous and avenging God is the LORD; The LORD is avenging and wrathful. The LORD takes vengeance on His adversaries, and He reserves wrath for His enemies. (3) The LORD is slow to anger and great in power, and the LORD will by no means leave the guilty unpunished.

(God is Good and a Strong Refuge)

Nahum 1:7

(7) The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble, and He knows those who take refuge in Him.

(Nineveh, the Harlot, will be destroyed)

Nahum 3:1-5

(1) Woe to the bloody city, completely full of lies and pillage; her prey never departs. (2) The noise of the whip, the noise of the rattling of the wheel, galloping horses, and bounding chariots! (3) Horsemen charging, swords flashing, spears gleaming, many slain, a mass of corpses, and countless dead bodies--they stumble over the dead bodies! (4) All because of the many harlotries of the harlot, the charming one, the mistress of sorceries, who sells nations by her harlotries and families by her sorceries. (5) *"Behold, I am against you,"* declares the LORD of hosts; *"And I will lift up your skirts over your face, and show to the nations your nakedness and to the kingdoms your disgrace."*

BOOK OF HABAKKUK:

The prophet, Habakkuk, is a rather obscure figure, but his book is one of the gems of the Old Testament. It seems to have been written shortly before the Battle of Carchemish in 605 B.C., when the Babylonians became the undisputed power in the area. Habakkuk's problem was theodicy or divine justice. Internally, he saw violence, lawbreaking, and injustice go unpunished, so he questioned God about it. God's answer only troubled him more, so he raised the question of God's justice again. God reassured Habakkuk by

telling him that if he could only wait, it would all be clear to him. This satisfied Habakkuk, and with renewed faith, he seemed to conclude that, given God’s holiness, his own questions were unjustified (2:20). Chapter three is a prayer psalm which ends with another strong statement of faith. For a book of such small size, Habakkuk has wielded remarkable influence. The Habakkuk Commentary is the most well-preserved Old Testament commentary of those found among the Dead Sea Scrolls and reflects a type of Old Testament exegesis which helps us understand better much of the New Testament’s use of the Old Testament. More significantly, Habakkuk 2:4 was used by Paul in Romans 1:17 to introduce the principle of justification by faith rather than by works, and it was Martin Luther’s interpretation of this verse which totally reoriented his thinking and contributed to the beginning of the Protestant Reformation.

(Habakkuk asks God why He doesn’t punish the injustice in Judah)

Habakkuk 1:2-4

(2) *“How long, O LORD, will I call for help, and Thou wilt not hear? I cry out to Thee, “Violence!” Yet Thou dost not save. (3) Why dost Thou make me see iniquity, and cause me to look on wickedness? Yes, destruction and violence are before me; strife exists and contention arises. (4) Therefore, the law is ignored and justice is never upheld. For the wicked surround the righteous; therefore, justice comes out perverted.”*

(God answers saying Chaldeans (Babylonians) will be raised up to punish Judah)

Habakkuk 1:6

(6) *“For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans, that fierce and impetuous people who march throughout the earth to seize dwelling places which are not theirs.”*

(Habakkuk questions how God can use an evil nation to punish His people)

Habakkuk 1:12-13

(12) Art Thou not from everlasting, O LORD, my God, my Holy One? We will not die. Thou, O LORD, hast appointed them to judge; and Thou, O Rock, hast established them to correct. (13) Thine eyes are too pure to approve evil, and Thou canst not look on wickedness with favor. Why dost Thou look with favor on those who deal treacherously? Why art Thou silent when the wicked swallow up those more righteous than they?

(God will distinguish between the Proud and the Faithful)

Habakkuk 2:4

(4) *“Behold, as for the proud one, His soul is not right within him; but the righteous will live by his faith.”*

Comments:

Paul used this famous verse to lay down the principle of justification by faith, not by works or the law (Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11). The writer of Hebrews employed this verse to underscore his point about the need for faithfulness (Hebrews 10:37-38).

(Habakkuk’s prayer for God’s people and witness of faith in the midst of strife)

Habakkuk 3:2, 17-18

(2) *“LORD, I have heard the report about Thee and I fear. O LORD, revive Thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make it known; in wrath remember mercy... (17) Though the fig tree should not blossom, and there be no fruit on the vines, though the yield of the olive should fail, and the fields produce no food, though the flock should be cut off from the fold, and there be no cattle in the stalls, (18) yet I will exult in the LORD, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.”*

BOOK OF ZEPHANIAH:

Zephaniah had a brief but powerful message for a people locked in religious apostasy. His four-generation genealogy, going back to an unidentified Hezekiah, may indicate that he was of royal descent. The conditions which he addressed reflect Judah in the decade before Josiah’s reforms in 621 B.C. If he was a member of the royal family, he may have been one of the dominant influences on the young king to reverse the apostasy of his father and grandfather. Zephaniah was an urban prophet whose message to Judah focused on Jerusalem. The description of God searching Jerusalem with lamps (Zephaniah 1:12) formed the basis of the way that Zephaniah was represented in Medieval art. Zephaniah addressed a people who had misplaced their religious loyalties. The gods of Canaan, Assyria, and Ammon were being worshiped, but the Lord was being neglected. Some concluded that the Lord was no longer active in their history. To this Zephaniah responded with the strongest development of the theme of “the Day of the

Lord” to be found in the prophets. Terrible punishment was coming, but after the return of the faithful, Jerusalem would have a glorious future.

The basis of the prophecy is the great doctrine of God’s universal judgment, which includes:

(1) A universal judgment, like the Deluge in destructiveness (1:2-3).

(2) A call to repentance as the only possible means of escape (2:1-2), especially a summons to the humble and God-fearing to seek Yahweh and perhaps obtain deliverance (2:3); enforced by the certainty that God will punish other nations for their wickedness (2:4-15), and Jerusalem shall not escape, for she does not repent and the Lord in the midst of her is righteous (3:1-8).

(3) The blessed result of the judgment. The nations shall turn to the Lord (3:9-10), the remnant of Israel shall trust in the Lord and be holy (3:11-13), and the Lord shall reign gloriously and beneficently as king in the midst of His people (3:14-18), who shall be gathered from captivity and be in the earth (3:19-20).

(God’s Universal Judgment)

Zephaniah 1:2-3

(2) *“I will completely remove all things from the face of the earth,”* declares the LORD.

(3) *“I will remove man and beast; I will remove the birds of the sky and the fish of the sea, and the ruins along with the wicked; and I will cut off man from the face of the earth,”* declares the LORD.

(God’s Call for Repentance and Hope for Deliverance of the Humble Righteous)

Zephaniah 2:1-3

(1) Gather yourselves together, yes, gather, O nation without shame, (2) 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. (3) 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.”

Comment:

The heart of Zephaniah’s message is that the humble righteous may hope in God’s deliverance when God punishes the whole earth for its wickedness on the “Great Day of the Lord.”

(God’s Judgment through the removal of the proud and wicked will result in Peace)

Zephaniah 3:8-9, 19-20

(8) "Therefore, wait for Me," declares the LORD, "For the day when I rise up to the prey. Indeed, My decision is to gather nations, to assemble kingdoms, to pour out on them My indignation, all My burning anger; for all the earth will be devoured by the fire of My zeal. (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...

(19) "Behold, I am going to deal at that time with all your oppressors, I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will turn their shame into praise and renown in all the earth. (20) At that time I will bring you in, even at the time when I gather you together; indeed, I will give you renown and praise among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes," says the LORD.

Comment:

The “Great Day of the Lord” spoken of by the Old Testament prophets is closely resembled by the events depicted in the New Testament concerning the second coming of Christ and the peace which will follow after the wicked are removed and punished.

While the return from exile may have been viewed by many as the fulfillment of this passage, lasting peace was not the result and they would find themselves under Roman occupation and ultimately cast out of Jerusalem again and dispersed all over the world.

The gathering and ultimate world-wide punishment that will be followed by complete peace is more likely a reference to the events surrounding the return of Christ. The apostle Peter may provide the clearest reference to the coming “Day of the Lord” as seen below:

2 Peter 3:3-13

(3) Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, (4) and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming?

For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation.” (5) For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water, (6) through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water. (7) But the present heavens and earth by His word are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. (8) But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. (9) The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. (10) But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. (11) Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, (12) looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! (13) But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.

THE PROPHETESS HULDAH:

Huldah was a prophetess, who lived in the Second Quarter of Jerusalem (2 Kings 22:14). She was the wife of Shallum, keeper of the wardrobe, and was held in highest esteem. She lived during the reign of Josiah, and prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem, but added that on account of Josiah’s piety he should die before the coming of the catastrophe (2 Kings 22:12-20; 2 Chronicles 34:20-28). There is nothing else known about her and no biblical book that bears her name. She is only mentioned by name in 2 Kings 22:14 and 2 Chronicles 34:22.

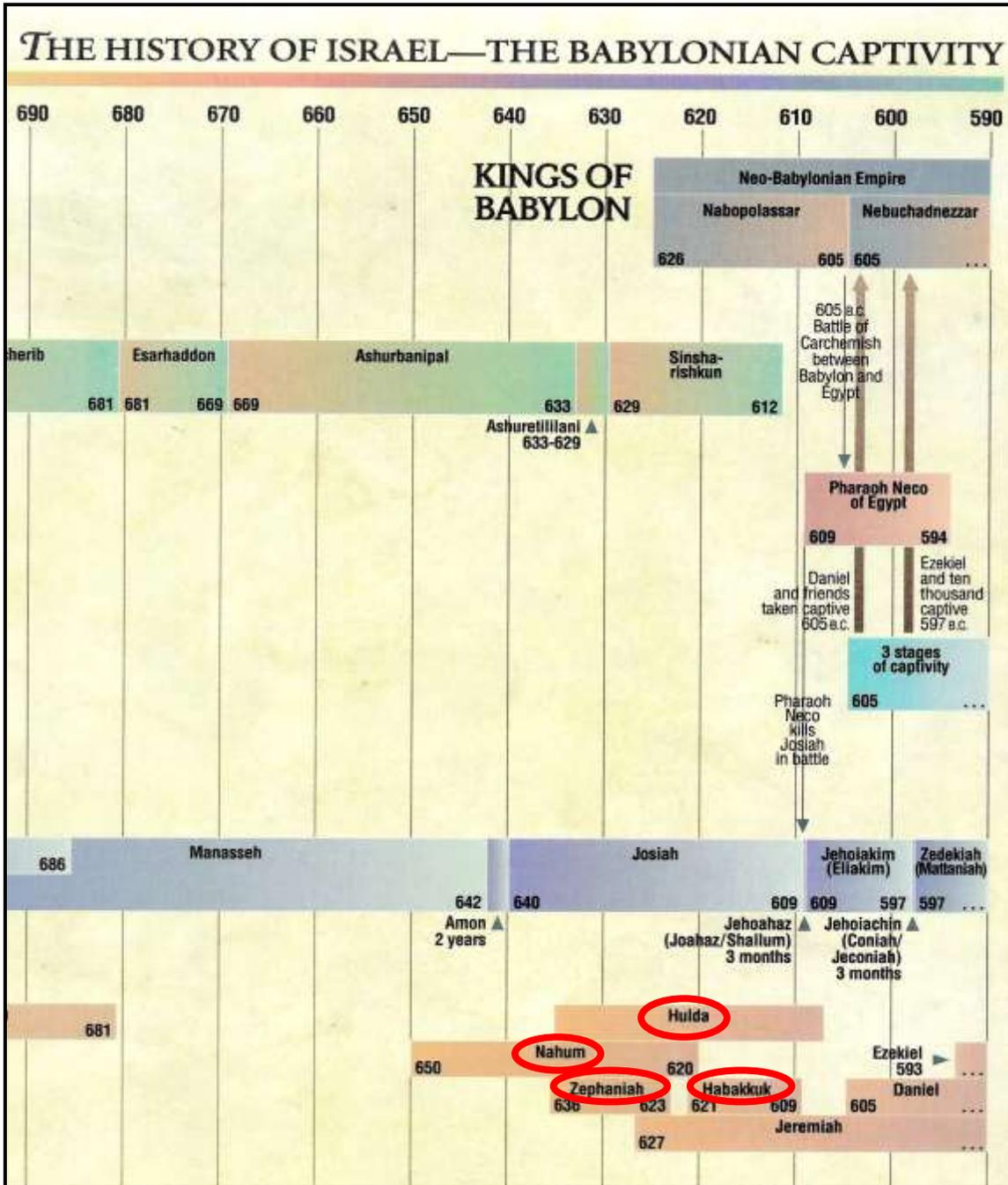
When Josiah succeeded Amon as king of Judah, he did not walk in the evil ways of the previous kings but “did right in the sight of the Lord and walked in all the way of his father David” (2 Kings 22:2). He ordered that Hilkiah the high priest count the money brought to the house of the Lord so it could be used to pay the workman who were repairing and restoring the Lord’s house. In this process a “book of the law” was discovered and given to Josiah. It is believed that this book was the main portion of the book of Deuteronomy. Upon reading it he realized that Judah had not been living

according to the way of the Lord and so he ordered that inquiry be made to the Lord regarding the words of the book (2 Kings 22:3-13). The prophetess Huldah is the one God sends to answer for God regarding Josiah’s inquiry (2 Kings 22:14). The following is her response in which God expresses His appreciation for Josiah’s grief and repentance by promising to hold back punishment upon Judah until after Josiah’s passing.

2 Kings 22:15-20

(15) And she said to them, *"Thus says the LORD God of Israel, 'Tell the man who sent you to me, (16) thus says the LORD, "Behold, I bring evil on this place and on its inhabitants, even all the words of the book which the king of Judah has read. (17) Because they have forsaken Me and have burned incense to other gods that they might provoke Me to anger with all the work of their hands, therefore My wrath burns against this place, and it shall not be quenched." ' (18) But to the king of Judah who sent you to inquire of the LORD thus shall you say to him, 'Thus says the LORD God of Israel, "Regarding the words which you have heard, (19) because your heart was tender and you humbled yourself before the LORD when you heard what I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants that they should become a desolation and a curse, and you have torn your clothes and wept before Me, I truly have heard you, "declares the LORD. (20) Therefore, behold, I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace, neither shall your eyes see all the evil which I will bring on this place." "'* So they brought back word to the king.

The chart below illustrates the time period in which Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah and Huldah lived.



References:

Commentary from “The New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible” and “Zodhiates’ Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible” published by AMG Publishers.

Chart from “The International Inductive Study Bible”