

(S) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. We will study the Minor Prophets in chronological order. Today we will study the three Minor Prophets: Micah, Nahum and Zephaniah. They prophesied during the eighth and seventh centuries B.C.

### **THE BOOK OF MICAH.**

#### **POINT 1. THE WRITER, RECIPIENTS AND DATE OF THE BOOK OF MICAH.**

Micah is the sixth of the twelve Minor Prophets. The name “Micah” or more completely “Micaiah” (Jer 26:18) means “*Who is like God*” (7:18). He lived in the region Southwest from Jerusalem bordering Philistia. He must be distinguished from another prophet called Micah mentioned in 1 Kings 22:8. Micah prophesied in the southern kingdom of Judah and directed his prophecies mainly to Judah, but also to Samaria (cf. 1:5-6). Micah prophesied during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah (1:1). According to chapter 1:6, he began his prophesying before the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C. and according to Jeremiah 26:18, he still prophesied during the days of Hezekiah. Thus, Micah prophesied from about 737 to after 727 or 714 B.C. He was a contemporary of the prophet Isaiah, who also worked in Judah, and the prophet Hosea, who worked in Israel. Micah lived during the time when Judah was continually attacked by Israel and Syria, and by the Philistines and Edomites (2 Ki 16:5f.; Isa 7:1f) and during the rise of the Assyrian Empire under Tiglath-Pilezer.

#### **POINT 2. THE MAIN MESSAGES OF THE BOOK OF MICAH.**

The prophet Micah generally has a message of judgement and salvation. Each section begins with accusation and judgement of sin and ends with a promise of salvation.

##### **First. Micah proclaims judgement.**

God calls all the people living on earth to listen to his accusation and judgement of Israel and Judah (1:2). In chapter 1 and 2, God accuses and judges particularly *the capitals Samaria and Jerusalem*. He accuses and judges them for their idolatry and their injustice. In chapter 3 to 5, God accuses and judges particularly *the leaders and prophets of Israel and Judah*. God condemns the leaders who strip the skin from their own people and chop their own people in pieces simply to profit themselves (3:2-3). God condemns the false prophets who prophesy lies and falsely proclaim peace when disaster is about to come (3:5). God condemns the judges for taking bribes, the priests for teaching for a price and the prophets for telling fortunes for money (3:11). And in chapter 6 to 7, God accuses and judges particularly *the people of Israel and Judah*. He condemns them for their empty ritualism of bringing many sacrifices, instead of doing what God required of them. Micah 6:8 says, “He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” He accuses and judges the people for following the traditions of the evil kings, Ahab and Omri, namely, idolatry, witchcraft and immorality (6:16). He accuses and judges the people because they sweep the godly people away from their midst, they murder and trap one another and their hands are skilled in doing evil (7:2-3).

##### **Second. Micah proclaims salvation.**

###### **One. The Messiah as the One who breaks open the way.**

In chapter 2:12-13, God promises that he will gather the remnant of the whole of Israel together and that he will lead them as a Shepherd and King. He promises that there will come One who breaks open the way through the gate of the sheep and that he will go up in front of God’s saved remnant. This is a reference to the Coming Messiah, Jesus Christ. This was partly fulfilled when after the exile to Assyria and Babylon, God led the remnant of Israel back to the land. It continued to be fulfilled at the First Coming of Jesus Christ, when God began to gather a new people for himself.

###### **Two. The Messiah as the ruler who shepherds his sheep.**

In chapter 4 and 5, God promises that he will gather and redeem the remnant of his people from Babylon (4:6,10). Then out of Bethlehem, God will give them a ruler “whose origins are from of old, from ancient times”. This is an expression that indicates that he existed before the creation, thus, forever (Ps 90:2). This ruler will be born of a woman and his birth will be the beginning of the great Messianic Age. Then the survivors of Judah (as “brothers of the Messiah”, because the Messiah comes from the tribe of Judah) will be joined with the Israelites, which here means the survivors of the ten tribes of Israel (Jer 3:18; Hos 1:11). Also the prophet Micah pictures the Messianic Age only in terms of the nation of Israel and its institutionalised forms. In the light of the New Testament revelation, this prophecy says that in Jesus Christ all the people of God from all nations in the world will be gathered and united to jointly enjoy salvation, fellowship with God and all the other blessings in Christ (5:3). This ruler will stand and shepherd his flock (5:4). The Messiah King is pictured, not as sitting on a throne, but as *standing among his people*, lovingly involved in their every

day life. This ruler will protect his flock with the strength and majesty of the Lord. When the Lord is called “this ruler’s God”, then the Messiah is here pictured in his human nature as the Mediator between man and God. This ruler’s greatness will reach to the ends of the earth (5:4). According to Luke 1:32-33, the angel Gabriel said concerning Jesus Christ, “He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end” (Isa 9:6-7; 11:10). And finally, this ruler will be their peace (5:5). The word *peace* summarises everything connected to salvation, because it speaks of peace between God and man, of peace between man and other men and of peace between the people of different nations. In the light of the New Testament revelation, according to Ephesians 2:14, Jesus Christ is our peace.

And then, with the Coming of this Messiah ruler, the Messianic Age will begin and chapter 4:1-2 will go into fulfilment: “The word of God will go out from Jerusalem” means that the gospel message will go out from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria and to the uttermost parts of the world (Act 1:8; Mt 28:29). People from all nations will come to this gospel message. They will learn God’s ways and walk in God’s paths. And finally, the Messianic Age will come to a close and chapter 4:3-4 will go into fulfilment: “God will judge between many peoples. ... They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.” This is a description of the Final Judgement Day. And after that, “every man will sit under his own vine and under his own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid.” This is a description of the new heaven and the new earth after the Final Judgement. Like all the Old Testament prophets, Micah described the end-time events in terms of the nation of Israel only, because he did not yet know the ‘mystery’ which was revealed to the apostles. According to that mystery the Gentile Christians would become heirs of this future glory together and on equal footing with the Jewish Christians (Eph 3:2-6).

### **POINT 3. THE DIVISION OF THE BOOK OF MICAH.**

The book of Micah may be given the title, “**God’s controversy with Israel and Judah.**”

It has three parts:

**Part 1: chapter 1-2.** God’s controversy with the capitals Samaria and Jerusalem.

Their idolatry and injustice will be punished (1:1 to 2:11). The remnant will be blessed: Their King will go ahead of them (2:12-13).

**Part 2: chapter 3 to 5.** God’s controversy with the leaders of Israel and Judah.

Their oppression, lies and greed for money will be punished (ch.3). The remnant, rescued from Babylon, will be blessed: Their Ruler will shepherd them and will be their peace (ch. 4-5. 5:2-5).

**Part 3: chapter 6-7.** God’s controversy with the people of Israel and Judah.

Their empty religious ritualism, injustice, violence and hatred for one another will be judged (6:1 to 7:7). Those who have the Lord as their Light will be blessed (7:8-9): God will forgive their sins and hurl all their iniquities into the depths of the sea (7:18-19)(7:8-20).

## **THE BOOK OF NAHUM.**

### **POINT 1. THE WRITER, RECIPIENTS AND DATE OF THE BOOK OF NAHUM.**

Nahum is the seventh of the twelve Minor Prophets. The name “Nahum” means *compassionate* (cf. 1:3,7). Nahum probably came from Judah. He addresses Judah in chapter 1:12,15 and thus definitely worked in Judah. The northern kingdom of Israel had already been taken into exile in 721 B.C. and Nahum only refers to their past ruin in chapter 2:2. Chapter 3:8-10 mentions the fall of Thebes in Egypt as a historical fact. The city was captured by Ashurbanipal in 663 B.C. But chapter 3:5-7 prophesies the fall of Nineveh as a future event. Nineveh fell in 612 B.C. Nahum describes Assyria as still being a powerful empire, and Nineveh as being a city of blood, full of lies, full of plunder, never without victims (3:1). He describes it as full of horses and war chariots, charging cavalry, flashing swords and glinting spears (3:2). There are many casualties, piles of dead, people stumbling over corpses (3:3). It is a city pictured as the alluring harlot and mistress of sorceries, who enslaved nations by her prostitution and peoples by her witchcraft (3:4). Nahum says that Nineveh still had its yoke on the neck of Judah and its shackles on its people (1:13). Thus, Nahum prophesied during the dark days of foreign domination for Judah, in which Judah was a vassal of Assyria and paid tribute to Assyria. The prophet Nahum must have prophesied during the early part of the reign of Manasseh, thus around 660 B.C. Nahum was a great poet and his book together with the book of Isaiah are the greatest prophesies written in poetic language!

### **POINT 2. THE MAIN MESSAGES OF THE BOOK OF NAHUM.**

**First. God is both the avenging God and the compassionate God.**

According to chapter 1:2-7, God will surely take vengeance on his foes and punish the guilty. He will certainly pour out his wrath on those who hate him and oppress his people. Chapter 1:6 asks, “Who can withstand his indignation? Who can endure his fierce anger? This is not in conflict with the New Testament teaching, because God’s holiness and

righteousness demands that he punishes the impenitent. But at the same time God is slow to anger and good, because he is a sure refuge for people in trouble and cares for people who trust in him! No one who trusts in the living God need to be terrified of him! Thus, both the Old and New Testaments teach that God is both a holy and a loving God.

### **Second. God's vengeance is revealed in the overthrow of Nineveh.**

The prophet Nahum's glorious task was to predict the overthrow of the capital of the mighty Assyrian Empire. God has given a sovereign command concerning Nineveh and she will be destroyed and her citizens will be carried into exile (1:14; 2:7). Whoever has the Almighty God against him is doomed! And in chapter 2:13, God says, "I am against you (3:5)." But Nahum's prophecy is at the same time a message against every other "Nineveh", against every other mighty city that seeks to seduce God's people or seeks to destroy them. The description of the city of Nineveh is taken over by the apostle John in Revelation chapter 17 to describe "Babylon, the great harlot". The apostle John also prophesied the overthrow of that Babylon. Nineveh, Babylon and Rome became symbols of every other godless city in the world, which try to seduce Christians or destroy Christians. Therefore Nahum's prophecy is a warning concerning the terrible vengeance of the living and holy God against every godless city in the world.

### **POINT 3. THE DIVISION OF THE BOOK OF NAHUM.**

The book of Nahum may be given the title, "**God's vengeance and goodness revealed in Nineveh's overthrow.**"

It has two parts:

**Part 1:** chapter 1:1-8. A hymn contrasting God's vengeance upon his enemies with his goodness towards his own people.

**Part 2:** chapter 1:9 to 3:19. Nineveh's overthrow predicted.

Nineveh's overthrow means Judah's freedom (1:9-15). Nineveh's siege and fall (2:1-13). Nineveh's destruction (3:1-19).

## **THE BOOK OF ZEPHANIAH.**

### **POINT 1. THE WRITER, RECIPIENTS AND DATE OF THE BOOK OF ZEPHANIAH.**

Zephaniah is the ninth of the twelve Minor Prophets. The name "Zephaniah" means "*the Lord has hidden or treasured*". Chapter 1:4 clearly teaches that Zephaniah worked in Judah. Zephaniah prophesied during the reign of Josiah (1:1). Because he preaches against the gross idolatry in Judah, he must have prophesied before Josiah began his great reformation of wiping out idolatry. Zephaniah does not mention the invasion of the Scythes into Philistia in 630 B.C. We therefore conclude that Zephaniah most probably prophesied between 639-630 B.C.

### **POINT 2. THE MAIN MESSAGES OF THE BOOK OF ZEPHANIAH.**

#### **First. A prophecy that the day of the Lord's wrath is certainly coming.**

**One. The day of the Lord's wrath is near for the Lord's own people.**

Zephaniah saw all the idolatry and injustice in Judah during the early part of the reign of king Josiah. He prophesied that God would judge the wicked. He saw how Jerusalem had become a city of oppressors, rebellious and defiled. The people of Jerusalem were proud and arrogant, because they obeyed no one and accepted correction from no one. They did not trust in the Lord. Their government officials, who should have maintained justice, were greedy robbers tearing their own people into pieces, like gluttonous wolves. Their prophets, who should have proclaimed God's Word, were light-hearted deceivers. Their priests, who should have guarded the holiness of God's temple, profaned the sanctuary and transgressed God's law. And all the people and leaders continued to do this in spite of God's constant and stirring pleading to fear him and accept correction (3:1-7).

**Two. The day of the Lord's wrath is near for the other nations at that time.**

Zephaniah also saw the wickedness of the surrounding nations and prophesied that God would judge them too. The people of the surrounding nations were also proud and insulted and mocked God's people. They had no fear or respect for the Almighty God (2:10). Zephaniah prophesied against the pride of the then still great Assyrian Empire, that she too would be judged. The great city of the Assyrians, called Nineveh, was a carefree city, who regarded herself as living in safety and as being the greatest city in the world (2:15).

**Three. The day of the Lord's wrath is near for all future nations.**

Zephaniah not only prophesied the judgement of the godless nations of his time, but also the judgement of the future godless nations. According to chapter 1:18, the day of the Lord's wrath will make a sudden end of all who live in the earth! Thus, Zephaniah's prophecy speaks also to our time and our nation.

## **Second. A prophecy concerning the great renewal.**

### **One. The future great renewal.**

Chapter 3:8 exhorts all people to expect the Final Judgement Day, on which God himself will be the Accuser, the Judge and the Executor of judgement! Chapter 3:9 prophesies that God will renew people from all nations on earth and they will serve God not as separate nations, but united shoulder to shoulder. Chapter 3:11-13 describes the New Jerusalem in which only people who trust in the Lord will live. As the Lord's sheep, they will be shepherded without anyone making them afraid (Heb 13:5-6). Chapter 3:14-17 describes the nature of salvation of the new Israel: all their sins will be atoned, their punishment removed and their enemies destroyed. God himself will live among them (Rev 21:3-5), at times quietly enjoying his love for his people and at times loudly rejoicing over them with singing. Chapter 3:18-20 describes especially the return from exile and the restoration of Israel in their land. In summary, on the day of God's wrath and thereafter, God will hide and exalt the remnant of his own people (2:3).

### **Two. Fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies.**

Zephaniah, like the other Old Testament prophecies, show two characteristics: On the one hand, they are directed towards the immediate future of the nation of Israel, like their return from exile and restoration to the land. On the other hand, they are directed towards the end-time, when people from all nations including from the nation of Israel will face God's Final Judgement. Then God's people from all nations including the nation of Israel will become heirs of God's glorious new heaven and new earth. Thus, Old Testament prophecy summarises events to be fulfilled at different periods in the future together in one end-time picture. These various events cannot be clearly separated into those which belong to the immediate future of Israel and those which belong to the end-time. Three facts point towards this characteristic of Old Testament prophecy: The return from exile is described in much more glorious terms than actually happened in 537 B.C. and therefore waits a more complete fulfilment. The announced future judgement can to some extent be seen in the temporary judgements that God executed over Israel and the nations. And the beginning of final glorious renewal has already been made in God's gracious salvation work through Jesus Christ.

## **POINT 3. THE DIVISION OF THE BOOK OF ZEPHANIAH.**

The book of Zephaniah may be given the title, "**God will hide his people in the day of wrath.**"

It has two parts:

**Part one:** chapter 1:1 to 3:7. The day of wrath.

The day of wrath for the whole earth announced (1:2-3). The day of wrath for Judah (1:4-13). The day of wrath for the whole earth pictured (1:14-18.). Repent before the day of wrath comes (2:1-3). The day of wrath for nations (2:4-15). The day of wrath for Jerusalem (3:1-7).

**Part two:** chapter 3:8-20. The great renewal.

On the final day of judgement, God will be the Accuser, Judge and Executor of judgement (3:8). God will renew people from all nations (3:9). The New Jerusalem (3:11-13). The nature of salvation in the new Israel (3:14-17). The return from exile (3:10,18-20).

### **ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK**

**First.** During the next week, read Habakkuk, Obadiah and Haggai. Next week we will introduce these books.

**Second.** See the workbooks "Go and preach God's Kingdom" and Internet on [www.dota.net](http://www.dota.net)

**Third.** Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to "Discipleship training on the air".