

Two Year Bible Trek
Week 62
Zephaniah and Nahum

Key Concepts: The key concept in these readings is that Judah will suffer for its arrogance and worship of other gods while Assyria will suffer an even greater punishment for its arrogance and abuse of other nations.

Stories: Zephaniah is divided into three sections, each corresponding to the present three chapters. The first chapter is focused on the coming Day of the Lord during which Judah and Jerusalem will be punished for their apostasy and their unwillingness to be faithful to God. Chapter two looks at punishment for all of the nations who oppressed Judah. Chapter three offers the possibility of a remnant remaining after the destruction. Nahum is focused on the destruction of Assyria.

Brief Summary: Both of these prophets were at work during the reign of Josiah, a time when the power of Assyria was fading, yet when there were still remnants of the worship of other gods. Though Josiah would eventually make great strides in returning the nation to worshipping YHWH, when Zephaniah preached those efforts had not yet begun. It might even be that his words had some impact on the young Josiah. Nahum's message appears to come a bit later when the power of Assyria was about spent and the prophet predicts its doom.

We begin with Zephaniah. The structure of Zephaniah is similar to that of other prophetic writings. It begins with a condemnation of the nation of Judah. Recall at this point that Judah had essentially thrown out any meaningful worship of YHWH. It had been replaced by the worship of a variety of gods and the practices, such as child sacrifice, associated with those gods. The prophet declares that God will utterly sweep away the nation and its people. This is the only appropriate punishment for those who had worshipped Baal, worn foreign attire and filled the city with violence and fraud. The destruction will spare no one including the king and his sons and all of those who had become wealthy off of the oppression of the people.

The second chapter extends this punishment to the nations who had devastated God's people. These nations include some of Judah's ancient enemies, such as the Philistines, Moab, Ammon and Assyria. Each will be dealt with by God because the word of the Lord is against them. By the very fact that Assyria is mentioned helps us to date the book as coming from the beginning of Josiah's reign.

The third chapter begins once again with Jerusalem's destruction, but then moves to the possibility that God will save some of God's people as a remnant. When God saves them they will speak one language (looking toward Pentecost), will call on the name of the Lord and serve the Lord with one accord. The nation will become an almost perfect people. So even in the midst of destruction there is hope.

Nahum on the other hand offered no hope at all to Assyria. In fact Nahum was almost gleeful in the utter destruction which God would bring upon that nation. God is "a jealous God and avenging, the Lord is avenging and wrathful..." Nahum's message is that what goes around comes around. The desolation which Assyria brought on so many nations would be brought upon her. Nahum made it clear as well that this bad news for Assyria was good news for Judah. God's people could return to true worship. "Keep your feasts, O Judah, fulfill your vows, for never shall the wicked come against you, he is utterly cut off."

1. What are your thoughts on God's eventual restoration of the world?
2. What word of hope would you give to the world today?
3. How do you deal with Nahum's statements about God as a wrathful God?