

# Through the Bible - Micah & Nahum

## Setting

- **[SLIDE - Timeline]** Nothing is known of the prophet Micah's personal life apart from what is stated in the heading of the book.
- Micah 1:1 — “in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah”
  - What happened during the reigns of those kings?
  - He was a contemporary of Isaiah.
- **[SLIDE - Map]** Micah is from the town of Moresheth-Gath
- Micah 1:1 — The word of the LORD... which [Micah] saw regarding Samaria and Jerusalem.
  - What's going on in Samaria at this time?
  - What's going on in Jerusalem at this time?

## Opening

- Micah 1:3 — For behold, the LORD is coming forth from His place. He will come down and tread on the high places of the earth.
- God is NOT happy. He's on his way to deal with the people of Israel. Why?
- **[READ Micah 1:5]**
- So, why is Samaria the wrongdoing of Jacob?
  - **[READ Micah 1:9]**
- What is God going to do to Samaria?
  - **[READ Micah 1:16]**

## The Coming Apocalypse

- The oppression of the poor, the widows, and orphans is a constant refrain in the prophets.
- The LORD is coming to bring justice to those who are oppressed.
- **[READ Micah 2:3]** “a catastrophe from which you cannot remove your necks”
  - This is the exile spoken of before in Micah 1:16
- **[READ Micah 2:9]**
- However, despite this coming apocalypse, despite the justice that is required, the prophet also speaks of the future, of the time when the exile is complete.
- **[READ Micah 2:12–13]**

## Denouncing Rulers

- Chapter 3 continues the denouncement of the rulers who oppress the people and lead them astray.
- First he speaks to the leaders of the Israel and Judah:
  - **[READ Micah 3:1–2]**
- Then he calls out the “prophets who lead my people astray”
  - He calls them “diviners and seers,” in other words, not valid prophets of the LORD.

- He calls out all of these leaders for lying and relying on cheap grace
  - Micah 3:11 — Yet they lean on the LORD, saying,
    - “Is the LORD not in our midst? Catastrophe will not come upon us.”
  - [SLIDE] What is cheap grace? Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German Christian who died in a concentration camp in the Holocaust, wrote the following in his book *The Cost of Discipleship*:
    - Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance... Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will go and sell all that he has. It is the pearl of great price to buy which the merchant will sell all his goods.
- [READ Micah 3:12]

## The Messianic Age

- The first three verses of Micah 4 are also repeated in Isaiah 2.
- It’s unclear who is quoting whom, but they were contemporaries so maybe they quoted from each other. The prophecy is very clear about what will happen.
- The description here is a picture of the Messianic Age, the time when Messiah will rule and reign over Israel.
- [READ as you go]
- Verse 1
  - “mountain of the house of the LORD” = Mount Moriah, Jerusalem
    - Recall the prophecy in Micah 3:12
  - “And the peoples will stream to it.”
    - Isaiah says, “And all the nations will stream to it.”
    - עַמִּים *amim* vs. עַמֵּי הַגּוֹיִם *goyim*
- Verse 2
  - Then these terms are reversed:
    - Many nations will come and say,
    - And many peoples will come and say,
  - What do they say?
    - Come and let’s go up to the mountain of the LORD and to the house of the God of Jacob,
  - Why? What are the nations or the peoples wanting?
    - So that He may teach us about His ways, and that we may walk in His paths.”
  - What are the “ways” and the “paths” of God? What do the non-Jewish peoples want?
    - “For from Zion will go forth the [Torah], and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.”
    - The Torah! The instructions, the commandments, the paths of the LORD are found in the Torah.
- Verse 3
  - What will happen in that day, when Messiah sits on the throne as the king of Israel?

- “And He will judge between many peoples and render decisions for mighty, distant nations.”
    - Again, Isaiah reverses these terms in his version.
  - Then, after judging the nations, Messiah will bring peace.
    - Not just by fiat. The nations will turn their swords into plows all on their own!
- Verse 4
  - This is where the two texts diverge.
  - Micah continues by saying, “Instead, each of them will sit under his vine and under his fig tree”
  - [SLIDE] This is an AI-generated depiction of “An ancient disciple sitting under his vine and under his fig tree.”
  - What is this a reference to?
    - 1 Kings 4:25 — So Judah and Israel lived securely, everyone under his vine and his fig tree, from Dan even to Beersheba, all the days of Solomon.
    - Zechariah, a prophet who lived 200 years later (520 BCE) uses the same language:
      - Zechariah 3:8-10 — I am going to bring in My servant the Branch (קנף)... On that day,’ declares the LORD of armies, ‘every one of you will invite his neighbor to sit under his vine and under his fig tree.’ ”
    - In biblical and rabbinic literature, fig trees and vines symbolize the peace and prosperity of the Messianic Age. When Solomon ruled over Israel, every man sat under his own vine and fig tree, and in the Messianic Age to come, every man will sit under his own vine and fig tree. The vine creates shade and shelter from the heat and rain. The grapes provide wine. The fig tree provides shade and food. It is a poetic way of saying, “Everyone will have everything they need.” (*Jesus, My Rabbi*, Lesson 13, pp. 16-17)
    - Rebbi Hiyya bar Abba and his group... were sitting to study Torah under a fig tree. The owner of the fig tree was coming every morning at sunrise and collected figs. They said, maybe he mistrusts us, let us change place. The next day, the owner of the fig tree came to them; he said to them: the one mizwah that you used to do with me you are withholding from me. ([Jerusalem Talmud, Berakhot 2:8](#))
    - This phrase is also used in 1 Maccabees 14:11-12 — He [Simon] made peace in the land, and Israel rejoiced with great joy: For every man sat under his vine and his fig tree, and there was none to fray them.
- Verse 7
  - “I will make those who limp a remnant”
  - The concept of the remnant is seen throughout the scriptures.
  - The remnant are those of the nation of Israel who are upright and choose to follow the LORD.
  - 1 Kings 19:18 — “Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him.”
  - Isaiah 10:21 — A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God.

- Jeremiah 23:3 — “Then I Myself will gather the remnant of My flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and bring them back to their pasture, and they will be fruitful and multiply.
- Romans 11:5 — In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God’s gracious choice.

## Messiah’s Return and Reign

- “But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,”
  - Ephrathah was a name given to a specific area around Bethlehem in the Tribal lands of Judah. 1 Chronicles 4:4 says, “Penuel was the father of Gedor, and Ezer the father of Hushah. These were the sons of Hur, the firstborn of Ephrathah, the father of Bethlehem.”
- “Too little to be among the clans of Judah,”
  - Rashi says, “You should have been the lowest of the clans of Judah because of the stigma of Ruth the Moabitess in you.” In other words, David’s line, which comes from Bethlehem, should have been stigmatized because there was a Midianite in his line. It was forbidden in the Torah for Jews to marry Midianites because they led the people of Israel into sin at Peor under the instruction of Balaam. However...
- “From you One will come forth for Me to be ruler in Israel.”
  - Rashi says this is “the Messiah, son of David, and so Scripture says (Ps. 118:22): “The stone the builders had rejected became a cornerstone.”
- His times of coming forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity.”
  - Rashi connects this to Ps. 72:17, which he translates, “Before the sun, his name is Yinnon”
  - According to Sanhedrin 98b, the school of Rabbi Yannai says that “Yinon” is the Messiah’s name based on Psalm 72:17:
    - יהי שְׁמוֹ לְעוֹלָם לְפָנֵי־שֶׁמֶשׁ יִנּוֹן שְׁמוֹ וְיִתְבָּרְכוּ בּוֹ כָּל־גּוֹיִם יְאֻשְׁרוּהוּ:
    - English translations of this verse usually render it something like this: “May his name be forever; before the sun, his name will be magnified, and men will bless themselves by him; all nations will praise him.”
    - However, if you point “שֶׁמֶשׁ” (sun) as “שָׁמַשׁ” and use the name Yinnon as it is used in the text, another translation option for the verse is:
      - “May His name be forever; before the servant, Yinnon is his name; men will bless themselves by him, all the nations will praise him.”
    - The name Yinnon refers to the eternal nature of the Messiah, the Servant of God (Isaiah 53), who was eternally existent, even before the sun.
- “Therefore He will give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth.”
  - This seems to refer to the exile, the time when the people of Israel are not in the land.
- “Then the remainder of His kinsmen will return to the sons of Israel.”
  - Rashi says, “The brothers of the King Messiah; i.e., the rest of the tribe of Judah and Benjamin shall join the other tribes and become one kingdom, and they shall no longer be divided into two kingdoms.”
  - This is again a reference to the remnant. We see a foreshadowing of this in 2 Chronicles 30, when Hezekiah invited the remnant of the nation of Israel to join with

the tribes in Judah to celebrate the Passover, and some from the tribes of Asher, Manasseh, and Zebulun came to Jerusalem for the festival.

- “And they shall dwell.”
  - The word here in Hebrew is יָשָׁבוּ *iyashavu* which Rashi translates as “And they shall return”, saying that it refers to the exiles of Israel returning when Messiah reigns in Jerusalem.
- “Because at that time He will be great to the ends of the earth. This One will be our peace.”
  - Messiah Yeshua will be the king over the whole world, and will bring peace.
- v. 7 — “Then the remnant of Jacob will be among many peoples”
- v. 8 — “The remnant of Jacob Will be among the nations, Among many peoples”
  - Again, the remnant will return, but will be among many peoples. All the nations will come to Jerusalem to worship the God of Israel with the Jewish people.

## Indictment Against the Israel

- God brings a legal indictment against his people Israel.
- 6:1 — “Arise, plead your case before the mountains, And let the hills hear your voice.”
  - Why are the mountains and hills the witnesses?
  - Deuteronomy 30:19 — “I call heaven and earth to witness against you today”
  - Israel had broken the covenant, witnessed by heaven and earth, so God calls on the “enduring foundations of the earth” to stand as witnesses in the trial.
- 6:5 — “remember now what Balak king of Moab planned and what Balaam son of Beor answered him,”
  - This story is found in Numbers 22
- “from Shittim to Gilgal”
  - This is a reference back to the crossing of the Jordan River, which started at Shittim and ended at Gilgal (Joshua 3:1 and 4:19)

## Requirements

- **[READ Micah 6:7–8]**
  - Proverbs 21:3 — “To do righteousness and justice Is preferred by the LORD more than sacrifice.”
  - Does this mean that God does not desire sacrifice? No, he commanded it.
  - It means that the sacrifice is ineffective if you are not pursuing righteousness and justice.
  - **[Isaiah 1:11-17]**
    - First, God expresses how much he dislikes Israel’s offerings, their Sabbath keeping, and their observance of the festivals.
    - But the problem is that they are just being hypocrites.
    - “Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Stop doing evil, Learn to do good; Seek justice, Rebuke the oppressor, Obtain justice for the orphan, Plead for the widow’s case.

## Eat and Be Satisfied

- 6:14 — “You will eat, but you will not be satisfied”
  - This is a reference back to Deuteronomy 8:10:
    - “When you have eaten and are satisfied, you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land which He has given you.”
    - Grace after meals

## God Is Your Salvation

- Yes, there is evil. Yes, there is injustice.
- However, (7:7) “I will be on the watch for the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation.”
- 7:12 — the nations will invade, the earth will become a wasteland.
- **[READ 7:14]**
- **[SLIDE - Map]** “Let them feed in Bashan and Gilead as in days of old.”
- The prophet Micah concludes his writings with a reminder to God about his own nature
  - **[READ Micah 7:18-20]**
  - The God of pardon
  - He delights in Mercy
  - He tramples wrongdoing and casts sins into the depths of the sea.
  - These are all part of the nature of God!
- But again, what’s the immediate context here? What is the Prophet talking about specifically in this context?
  - He reminds us in verse 20:
    - You will give truth to Jacob and favor to Abraham, which You swore to our forefathers from the days of old.
  - God promises redemption and restoration for the Jewish people, the chosen people of God, because of the promises he gave to their forefathers.

## Nahum

- Nahum was active as a prophet from 663-612 BCE.
- This was during the reigns of Manasseh, Amon, and Josiah, kings of Judah, and during the times of the prophets Zephaniah, Habakkuk, and the first part of Jeremiah.
- This was also in the final years of the Assyrian Empire, under Ashurbanipal and the kings who reigned after him.
- We talked about this time period in a class on 2 Kings 21-23 at the end of January. If you would like a refresher on that material, the audio, notes, and presentation are available on the class website.
- Nahum’s name (נְחֻמַּיִם) means “comfort.”
- He is described as an Elkoshite. Most ancient and modern commentators say that this means he is from a city named Elkosh, but that city has not been located.

## Pronouncement on Nineveh

- Nahum 1:1 — “The pronouncement of Nineveh. The book of the vision....”
- We know of a prophet who prophesied about Nineveh, right? Jonah!
  - Rashi says, “A book of vision has already been written concerning it [Nineveh], the prophecy of Jonah son of Amittai; and now, again, Nahum the Elkoshite prophesied this harsh prophecy over it.”
- “Pronouncement” here is *מַשָּׂא* *massa*, a harsh prophecy
- “book of the vision” is *סֵפֶר חֲזוֹן* *sefer chazon*.
- Targum Yonatan, a first century paraphrase of the Hebrew Bible into Aramaic, paraphrases verse 1 like this:
  - The burden of the cup of cursing which Nineveh is to be made to drink. First Jonah, son of Amitti, of Gath Hopher, prophesied against her, and she turned from her sins; and now that she sinned again, Nahum from the house of Koshi prophesied against her again, according as it is written in this record.
- So, the prophecy here is directed at Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, and thus on the entire Assyrian nation.

## God of Vengeance

- [READ Nahum 1:2]
- The LORD is a jealous and avenging God, but He is also slow to anger.
- He is also powerful!
- Nahum 1:9 — Whatever you devise against the LORD, He will make a complete end of it.

## Good News

- The destruction of the Assyrians is good news for Israel!
- [READ Nahum 1:15]
- [READ Nahum 2:2]

## Nineveh Will Be Destroyed

- Much of the rest of the book of Nahum is focused on the coming destruction of Nineveh.
- The Assyrians won’t be able to avoid the destruction.
- 3:1 — “Woe to the bloody city, completely full of lies and pillage”
- 3:8 — Are you better than No-amon?
  - No-amon is a reference to the city of Thebes (see Jeremiah 46:25, “The LORD of armies, the God of Israel says: “Behold, I am going to punish Amon of Thebes...”))The Assyrians had sacked Thebes in 663 BCE.
- [READ Nahum 3:19]
  - “Your wound is incurable.”
- The Babylonian Chronicle Concerning the Fall of Nineveh (ABC 3 — <https://www.livius.org/sources/content/mesopotamian-chronicles-content/abc-3-fall-of-nineveh-chronicle/>) describes the fall like this:

- The king of Akkad mustered his army and marched to Assyria. The king of the Medes marched towards the king of Akkad and they met one another at [...]u. The king of Akkad and his army crossed the Tigris; Cyaxares had to cross the Radanu, and they marched along the bank of the Tigris. In the month Simanu, the Nth day, they encamped against Nineveh.  
From the month Simanu until the month Âbu - for three months - they subjected the city to a heavy siege. On the Nth day of the month Âbu they inflicted a major defeat upon a great people. At that time Sin-šar-iškun, king of Assyria, died. They carried off the vast booty of the city and the temple and turned the city into a ruin heap.
- After Nineveh was sacked by the Babylonians and their allies in 612 BCE, it is unclear who exactly ended up controlling the site.
  - There is some evidence it might have been controlled by the Medes, who had helped the Babylonians in the battle.
  - Ancient Greek professional soldier and writer Xenophon wrote a book called *Anabasis* around 401 BCE, about 200 years after the destruction of Nineveh. *Anabasis* gives an account of the expedition of the Ten Thousand, an army of Greek mercenaries hired by Cyrus the Younger to help him seize the throne of Persia from his brother, Artaxerxes II. Xenophon says:
    - From this place they marched one stage, six parasangs, to a great stronghold, deserted and lying in ruins. The name of this city was Mespila, and it was once inhabited by the Medes. **[SLIDE Walls of Nineveh]** The foundation of its wall was made of polished stone full of shells, and was fifty feet in breadth and fifty in height. Upon this foundation was built a wall of brick, fifty feet in breadth and a hundred in height; and the circuit of the wall was six parasangs. (Xenophon, *Anabasis* 3.4:)
- Regardless, Nineveh was never the same. Parts of the city apparently continued to be utilized by different groups for the next few hundred years, including the Greeks under Alexander the Great and the Seleucids after him.
- However, the majority of the city of Nineveh was buried and abandoned. Eventually it was lost to time, with only some local references to the fact that it was actually Nineveh. The city of Mosul, Iraq, was built nearby and became an important location in the area.
- In the 1840s a British diplomat named Sir Austen Henry Layard started to excavate the city, sending as many of the artifacts as he could back to the British Museum.
  - **[SLIDE]** This is an artist's impression of a hall in an Assyrian palace from *The Monuments of Nineveh* by Sir Austen Henry Layard, published in 1853.
  - **[SLIDE]** This is one of those statues that protected the entrance into the King's palace.
- Excavations continued off and on into the 1920s, and many artifacts were discovered and sent to various locations around the world.
- One of the major finds was the Library of Ashurbanipal, a collection of more than 30,000 clay tablets bearing cuneiform inscriptions. The Ashurbanipal Library Project is documenting the Library as fully as possible in texts and images. I'll leave a link to that project on the website.
  - <https://oracc.org/asbp>