



***Becoming Fully Devoted Followers
by Studying the Followers Before Us***

WEEK 28

OBADIAH / MICAH / NAHUM

JULY 9-13, 2007

DAY	<i>THROUGH THE BIBLE</i>	ABBREVIATED STUDY
Monday	Obadiah 10-18; Psalm 136	Obadiah 10-18; Psalm 136
Tuesday	Micah 5; Psalm 137	Micah 4:1-8; Psalm 137
Wednesday	Micah 6; Psalm 138	Micah 6:6-8; Psalm 138
Thursday	Micah 7; Psalm 139	Micah 7:14-20; Psalm 139
Friday	Nahum 1-3; Psalm 140	Nahum 1:1-15; Psalm 140

Walk Through The Bible Readings
MONTH AT A GLANCE

July 8, Week 28 – Minor Prophets 1

Monday	Obadiah 10-18	Psalm 136
Tuesday	Micah 5	Psalm 137
Wednesday	Micah 6	Psalm 138
Thursday	Micah 7	Psalm 139
Friday	Nahum 1-3	Psalm 140

July 15-Week 29 – Minor Prophets 2

Monday	Zephaniah 1-3	Psalm 141
Tuesday	Haggai 1-2	Psalm 142
Wednesday	Jeremiah 1-6	Psalm 143
Thursday	Jeremiah 7-12	Psalm 144
Friday	Jeremiah 13-20	Psalm 145

July 22 – Week 30 – Jeremiah

Monday	Jeremiah 21-26	Psalm 146
Tuesday	Jeremiah 27-33	Psalm 147
Wednesday	Jeremiah 34-39	Psalm 148
Thursday	Jeremiah 40-45	Psalm 149
Friday	Jeremiah 46-52	Psalm 150

July 29 – Week 31 – Habakkuk

Monday	Lamentations 1-5	Psalm 1
Tuesday	Habakkuk 1-3	Psalm 2
Wednesday	Daniel 1-4	Psalm 3
Thursday	Daniel 5-6	Psalm 4
Friday	Daniel 7-10	Psalm 5

PRAYER JOURNAL

This week I am praying for . . .

. . . the members and friends of First Presbyterian Church of Upland as they mourn the tragic loss of students and youth workers as they were returning from a week-long mission trip to Bishop, California. Those who were injured and killed had just spent a wonderful week being selfless servants in the name of Jesus Christ, in giving of their time to work at a church and among the people in a Native American congregation in Bishop, CA, the Valley Presbyterian Church.

. travel mercies and safety for Shelley Ulrich as she travels in Kenya through July 13. Shelley will meet with PCEA Mt Kenya Region Woman's Guild leadership and PCEA Tumutumu Hospital leadership to prepare and plan for future HIV / AIDS education workshops.

. . . and for Ron & Wanda Sommers as they serve with Assemblies of God World Ministries in Belgium. Pray for their safety as well as for God's wisdom and provision. Ron and Wanda have been missionaries serving in various countries all over the world for over 26 years. Wanda is the sister of Glenkirk member Joyce Williams.

And . . .

READ

Obadiah 10-18

Psalm 136

REFLECT

Obadiah is one of the two prophets of the Old Testament for whom we have just a name (Malachi is the other). Since there is no other reference to this prophet in the OT, we must come to conclusions about the time and setting of this prophecy by considering the hints within the text itself.

This one chapter of 21 verses – the shortest in the OT – is a prophecy against the country of Edom. Edom lay to the south of Judah, between it and the Red Sea ports. Two major trade routes traversed Edom, allowing Edom an opportunity for wealth, but also opening it to attack by others. Edom’s history with Israel was rough. The Edomites were the descendants of Esau, the antagonistic brother of Jacob, and kept up a running battle with their cousins, and vice versa; at times Edom was conquered and ruled by Israel, and at times Edom raided Judah. The occasion for this prophecy seems to have been the behavior of Edom during Babylon’s defeat of Judah in 587 BC, taking Jerusalem and carrying her people off as captives. Edom apparently took the opportunity to raid its defenseless cousins (“your brother Jacob,” v.10), loot their wealth, and enslave their refugees (v.14). Obadiah assures Edom that the Lord has seen its arrogance and cruelty (v.3, 10), and will bring Edom to judgment, on the day when He will judge all the nations (v.15).

The language of Obadiah stresses the idea of “reversal.” Because of the arrogance of Edom, He will make it “small” (v.2-3). Because they build cities in high hills for easy defense, He will bring them “down” (v.4). Because they have ransacked, they will be ransacked. Because they have joined in the riotous “drinking in My holy mountain,” they must also drink the cup of His wrath (v.16). Their sins have brought destruction on

their own heads. But this is more than a statement of the fact that sin brings its own consequences. It is also a reaffirmation that the descendents of Jacob are no ordinary people, but remain the people of God, at the heart of God’s plan for the world. Indeed today nothing remains either of the small tribe of Edom, nor of the huge empire of Babylon. But Jerusalem remains, and in every nation today there are communities of those who worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the grace God showed in sending the Son of David to die and rise for the salvation of the world.

RESPOND

Some of Obadiah’s most telling language is reserved for the specific mistreatment by the Edomites of their Israelite “brothers” (v.11-14). The sharpness of God’s wrath in this prophecy takes its cue from the violation of this family relationship. I am the product of a large family, and I can read those verses and see all too clearly that in younger days I did or was willing to do just about any of those things (or their moral equivalent) in order to get back at, or get one up on, my siblings. Some families grow out of that intensely competitive stage; others don’t. Certainly we learn many lessons about ruthless competition *en famille* that we are apt to apply to business and community contexts today. But Obadiah challenges us first of all to understand that family bonds are sacred to the Lord, and we may not simply use them to get our own way, without unforeseeable consequences. And second, the Gospel that we preach is one that embraces all nations and people in the call to grace. Ruthlessness will be judged. The only true way forward for Christians in any context is faith in God, and readiness to love all we meet.

PRAY

Dear Lord, You remembered us in our low estate, You rescued us from our adversaries, and You are the one who sustains all human endeavor and life. We give thanks to You, God of heaven, for our steadfast love is everlasting. (From Psalm 136:23-26)

- D.D.

READ

Micah 4:1-8

Psalm 137

REFLECT

The prophet Micah (our subject for three days) was a contemporary of Isaiah, prophesying in Jerusalem during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. His role was remembered in the next generation, when Jeremiah's unrelenting negative prophecies prompted some to propose that he should be put to death for treason; but other leaders remembered the precedent of Micah, that he foretold the doom of Judah and yet was allowed to live, as a prophet of the Most High God (Jeremiah 26:10-19). He was stalwart in the fight for the soul of God's people, standing powerfully on behalf of the message the Lord had given him: judgment and hope.

There is some disagreement about how to understand the structure of the book of Micah. But a growing consensus suggests that his proclamations have been arranged into a 3-part book, each part beginning with the command, "Hear!" (Micah 1:2; 3:1, and 6:1). Each part has a prophecy of judgment, and then a promise of hope:

Part 1: Judgment, 1:2 – 2:11; Hope, 2:12-13

Part 2: Judgment, 3:1-12; Hope, 4:1 – 5:15

Part 3: Judgment, 6:1 – 7:7; Hope, 7:8-20

Today's passage, then, is the beginning section of one of the prophecies of hope. Micah has just described the inevitable reduction of Jerusalem and its environs to a heap of ruins, as a judgment upon the leaders of Israel, who deal in lies and misinformation rather than the truth of God (3:11-12). Suddenly Micah tells of a further future in which Jerusalem will be restored beyond imagination, as the center of the world in some sense, to which the nations will stream for the very thing that is now lacking: instruction in the word and ways of the Lord. Moreover, peace will finally take hold, a peace which Micah portrays in memorable images, both public and private: swords will be hammered into

plowshares, and each family will enjoy their vines and fig trees without fear. All of this will be accomplished by the Lord alone, and no credit will accrue to Israel: it is the lame and outcasts, strengthened by God, who will establish this new kingdom.

Most of the people of Micah's day rejected his word of imminent judgment (though Psalm 137 laments its reality); surely his vision of hope would have seemed equally impossible. Yet from our vantage point we see the fulfillment of so much of it. For centuries Jerusalem lay in degradation and ruins, under the Turks, and now is the center of world attention in a way that seems irreversible. Three religions look to Jerusalem in their response to God: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. And Christianity itself represents a huge multi-national, multi-ethnic focus on the God who brought salvation and hope through Israel and especially through Jesus the Israelite.

RESPOND

Micah's vision challenges us too. We may find some homeland peace under vines and fig trees, but clearly our nation is still keeping swords sharp and ready – and in the name of homeland security. I do believe, however, that the great experiment which is the USA is one authentic representative of Micah's hope, in that to a significant degree we are learning to live together in a very diverse society – in some sense "under God." It is not by any means easy, and perhaps we tend to dwell on setbacks, but Micah's prophecy sets out the direction of the Lord's work in this matter. As Americans we need to work for the positive, active peace so eloquently commended in the Scriptures (and to do our best to discern what it means, in terms of, for instance, an appropriate immigration policy). But as Christians our vision for peace must be even broader, encompassing the whole globe, and anticipating the Day of the Lord.

PRAY

Dear Lord, Help me today bring about an increase in peace in our world. Surely I am the lame and outcast one that You have rescued for Your kingdom; let that good news be on my lips today.

- D.D.

READ

Micah 6:6-8

Psalm 138

REFLECT

Today's passage is a part of one of the sections in Micah that announces the impending judgment of God upon Israel. The particular problems in the Israel of Micah's day, the particular ways in which their rebellion was manifested, seem to be similar to those Amos inveighed against. Part of it was the way the leaders twisted their role, following their own interests instead of God's ways (3:5, 9-11). Another was the exploitation of the poor by the rich (2:1-2; 8-9). And a third aspect, an ironic one given the basic lack of real interest in the things of the Lord, was that the rituals of religion were very elaborately observed.

In this passage Micah is attempting to bring them back to basics. "What does the Lord require of me?" is a question that resounds in each generation, and in the heart of each believer. Micah spurns the knee-jerk responses of his day in a rising crescendo of anger. No mere sacrifice can be the answer. If so, no massive display of wealth as a sacrifice will be any more effective. The allusion to child sacrifice is shocking, and meant to shock. It was a practice in some of the surrounding nations but forbidden in Israel (Lev 18:21), though it occasionally tempted some Israelites. Micah's sarcastic comment places all these efforts in their place: what do any of these have to do with "the sin of my soul?"

Micah then gives his own answer, with a verse that has had a powerful impact on Israel and the Church. First he puts the questioner in his or her place: What God requires, He requires from all, as "mere humans" ("O man"), without care for material resources. To put it differently, what He requires is at the same time easier and harder than

what Israel was offering at the time: easier because any believer is able to offer it, and harder because it demands far more personal commitment and consistency than they were willing to give. Five words in particular stand out: God requires justice, love, faithfulness, and humility; and these are to happen as a "walk" with the Lord.

To better consider the implications of these five words, I propose a particular application. Micah seems to have had a special care for children, as we see in this passage scorning child sacrifice. Likewise elsewhere he describes the damage done to children by unjust practices: "The women of My people you evict, each one from her pleasant house, and you take from her children their dignity [or "My dignity"] forever." How would we put in practice these five concepts in relation to children?

"Justice" is easily described, and not easily applied. "That's not fair!" "Well, life isn't fair!" Still, we fight tooth and nail when our children come under an unjust ruling at school. Love, too, is easily grasped, and its actual expression in relationships is universally acknowledged, but it's harder to find the loving thing to do. The third word, which I have given as "faithfulness" (KJV: "mercy"), is that Hebrew word "*hesed*" that really means "good covenanting." Children need to know that the important relationships in their lives are based on solid commitments. The fourth and fifth words reflect what children need to see in us: humility and consistency. Children need all these things, and the value of each of them is clear when we consider the needs of children. Why then deny them to other adults?

RESPOND

Where or to whom would you go if you knew you needed justice? love? good covenanting? humble and consistent leadership? We also need these things, each one of us.

PRAY

Dear Lord, Thank You for the way You jolt us out of complacency, and into fresh experiences of blessedness, as we walk with You.

- D.D.

READ

Micah 5: 2-5a; 7:14-20

Psalm 139

REFLECT

Today's passages are again from sections in Micah that prophesy the hope that Israel has in the Lord. The first, from chapter 5, is one of the great Old Testament predictions of Christ. A leader will come forth from the unlikely provenance of tiny Bethlehem, which implies He is in the line of David, but not of the line of Jerusalem kings. And yet His origins are also "from of old, from the days of eternity." His ministry will be that of shepherd (which in Israel implied the kingship as well), and "this One will be our peace."

The second passage, the word of hope that closes the book, also predicts a shepherd ruling Israel in the glorious future, but in this case the shepherd is God Himself. This new and wonderful day will echo the best of old times, in both the natural ("fruitful field" 7:14) and supernatural (7:15) provision of the Lord. The nations will also submit, not to Israel, but to the Lord. Most important is the reason for this reversal, that is, the reason for hope in the Lord: He is the only God who "pardons iniquity and passes over the rebellious acts of the remnant of His possession" (7:18). Indeed, He "will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea" (7:19). It is this forgiveness that assures the Lord's faithfulness (the last line of v.18 can be rendered, "He delights on good covenanting"). All of these blessings are simply the outworking of His promises to Abraham and his progeny. (Those of you who sing the occasional requiem know the Latin: *quam olim Abrahae promisisti, et semini ejus.*) As the Child of Bethlehem is "from of old," so the saving purposes of God, worked out against the realities of human sin and chronic rebellion, remain the same, and equally effective, "from of old."

Micah had a massive and effective anchor that held his heart and mind during the upheavals of his day. It also held him in face of the opposition that he himself created by articulating the word that the Lord had given him to speak. Micah knew that the best things in the history of

Israel were also going to be the best things about its future. God's presence, God's provision, God's admonition, God's plan, God's protection: not only were they Israel's prize heritage, but they were the very things that would guarantee its future.

We can't say of any other nation that this will necessarily be the case, that the best things of its past will become its strength in the future. Neither is this necessarily the case for any city, or church, or family, or person; none of us is guaranteed such things by life as we know it. But we *are* guaranteed such things by the God who calls us into His love. We can say this partly by faith in what the Scriptures tell us: His love shapes the best parts of our lives, and so these remain with us in memory but also in habit and fresh experience. Psalm 138 is a powerful testimony of this: We call and He answers, to accomplish not our desires but His own (Psalm 138:1, 7, 8). But many Christians can speak with confidence of a more subjective experience that confirms these texts: personal upheavals such as job changes, family traumas, or the death of a loved one, reveal the instability of life, but the stability of the Lord. And what lasts, if we are open to His love at such times, is the knowledge of His presence, and the eternal lessons learned of His faithfulness and power. The really good things of yesterday become the building blocks of tomorrow, *only because* our God is a God who knows how to address the evil, and establish the good.

RESPOND

Our church is in the midst of transitions, which naturally leaves us with questions about whether the shape of our future will match the strengths of our past. Micah assures us that as we understand Glenkirk's strength is *God Himself*, and His history of grace with us personally and corporately, then the joys of the past can only be the building blocks of the greater works of the future, to which He will call us, and in which He will delight together with us.

PRAY

Lord, Thank You for the faithfulness of Your work in us. Please use the circumstances of this day to help me learn Your love afresh.

- D.D.

READ

Nahum 1:1-15

Psalm 140

REFLECT

Nahum is another prophet that we know nothing about, except for what we read in the text. His name comes from the word for “comfort,” but the lion’s share of his book is a blast at the Assyrian empire, and especially the city of Ninevah. The passage for today’s reading contains most of the actual comfort of the book. Scholars note that this book has not made much of a splash in later times. There are no passages from it in the current lectionary, which means that there is probably no verse in it that we would recognize. An exception may be 1:3, which underlies a line from a hymn by William Cowper: “He plants his footstep in the sea and rides upon the storm.” (I do remember that we used to sing a chorus based on 1:7.) The book of Jonah offers an interesting contrast, since the burden of that book is the love of God for all creation, including Ninevah (Jonah 4:9-11). Here there is no such compassion expressed, but only wrath for the Assyrians and vindication for Judah. If Jonah’s story helps us see God’s love even for Ninevah, perhaps Nahum helps explain to us the implacable hatred of Jonah for all things Ninevan, and his resistance to preaching repentance there.

It is thought that Nahum prophesied in the years just prior to 621, when Babylon defeated Assyria decisively, destroying Ninevah. Thus his prophecy came true in short order.

Our passage today is composed of an opening hymn (1:2-8) using a sequence of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet to start each line, followed by a judgment (1:9-15) that includes both doom to the Assyrians and consolation to Judah. (The rest of the book seems structured as follows: Judgment #2, 2:1-13; Judgment #3, 3:1-7; Judgment #4, 3:8-13; Final Judgment, 7:14-20.) The hymn has as its theme the appearance of Yahweh as the mighty warrior bent on avenging His people. Taking

phrases and styles from the Psalms, Nahum presents the Lord as truly the God of heaven and earth, not to be compared with some local deity of a small tribe. This is the God who can summon the forces of nature themselves to do His will. Assyria has made a colossal mistake in demeaning the people of this God; “The Lord is good, and a stronghold in the day of trouble,” but His wrath against His enemies is implacable.

The passage 1:9-15 includes alternating words of condemnation and consolation, so that reading them can be confusing: for whom are they intended? The NIV translation has gone to the lengths of adding to the text the names “Ninevah” (in v.8, 11, 14) and “Judah” (in v.12; the text has it already in v.15) to clarify the recipients of the prophecy. The NASB and the NRSV allow the ambiguity to stand, suggesting that the consolation clearly meant for Judah in v.15 may in fact overflow to some degree onto the defeated refugees of Ninevah. In either case, there is a good case to be made here for reading the message of a book in its larger biblical context before we settle on its message. In other prophets we’ve read, when we’ve seen God point a finger at the other nations, He seems to be pointing His other three fingers back at His people, asking that they understand that they are much more responsible for the lesson.

RESPOND

The God of Nahum is an astonishingly powerful God – a God with any and all powers available to Him. But the “power” that motivates Him is nothing like hatred or wrath, but rather an all-consuming love for the whole world that has determined Him to bring salvation to all. And for that purpose, He preserved His people until the sending of His Son. And for that purpose He continues to love and preserve each one of us, throughout life and even throughout death.

PRAY

“Surely the righteous will give thanks to Thy name; the upright will dwell in Thy presence.” (Psalm 140:13)

- Dave Dorman