



JONAH,
MICAHA,
NAHUM,
HABAKKUK AND
ZEPHANIAH



John L. MacKay





JONAH,
MICAHA,
NAHUM,
HABAKKUK AND
ZEPHANIAH



John L. MacKay

CHRISTIAN
FOCUS



Unless otherwise indicated Scripture quotations taken from the *Holy Bible, New International Version*. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Hodder & Stoughton Publishers, A member of the Hodder Headline Group. All rights reserved. "NIV" is a registered trademark of International Bible Society. UK trademark number 1448790.

Scripture quotations marked NASB are taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation Used by Permission. www.lockman.org

Scripture quotations marked NKJV are taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked KJV are taken from the King James Version.

Copyright © John L. MacKay

ISBN 978-1-84550-345-1

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

First published in 1998

Reprinted in 2008

in the

Focus on the Bible Commentary Series

by

Christian Focus Publications Ltd.,

Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-shire,

IV20 1TW, Great Britain

www.christianfocus.com

The sections on Jonah, Micah and Nahum were previously published in 1993 as *God's Just Demands*

Cover design by Daniel Van Straaten

Printed and bound by

CPD Wales

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form, by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior permission of the publisher or a licence permitting restricted copying. In the U.K. such licences are issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency, Saffron House, 6-10 Kirby Street, London, EC1 8TS. www.cla.co.uk





Preface

It is not easy to know God. What is more, it can be uncomfortable to live knowing God. But knowing God is essential. 'Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent' (John 17:3). We must avoid the danger of corrupting our knowledge of God by substituting a human caricature of what God should be like for the revelation he has given in Scripture of what he really is. It is easy to be influenced by the ideas that exist of God as well-intentioned, undemanding, ready to accept us and give us what we want, and happy to make do with whatever we can scrape together to offer him of our time, resources and affection. Such a sentimental picture is plausible because it is effectively shaped by our sinful, human ideas, and lets us go on living as we please.

The five books of Scripture that are studied in this commentary act as an effective antidote to diminishing God by bringing him down to the sort of being we find it easy to live with. There is no doubt that the only true God is one who does abound in love (Jonah 4:2), delights to show mercy (Micah 7:18), and rejoices over his redeemed people with singing (Zeph. 3:17). But we have to learn that God's love and his concern, which encompass even a heathen city (Jonah 4:11), are only one aspect of his character. We must also know him as the one who 'will not leave the guilty unpunished' (Nahum 1:3). We have not really grasped who God is until we realise that living with him has to be done on his terms, not



ours. As the Creator of all, he has the right to demand how we live. As the Judge of all, he will exercise his right to demand that we account for what we have done. Knowing God as he really is leads us to acknowledge his just demands on us.

This is seen at various levels in these prophetic books. In Jonah, there is the matter of the personal demand made on the prophet. God requires individual obedience, even when the task is one which we do not understand, or with which we are out of sympathy. Disobedience merits God's judgment and wrath. There is also the divine demand for obedience from Nineveh. The pagan city at the heart of a great empire was not exempt from God's requirements and scrutiny, for he rules over all the kingdoms of mankind. If Nineveh had not changed her ways, she would have been engulfed by divine judgment.

In Micah, the focus is on the LORD's demands on his own people of Judah. They had been the recipients of God's favour, and he had entered into covenant with them. They were the ones whose lives should have been a living expression of their allegiance and gratitude. But they were not, and so Micah summoned them to consider and amend their ways which were out of alignment with God's covenant demands. If they did not repent, God would justly punish them. That would not, however, be God's last word about his chosen people. After they had been punished for their rebellion, God would again extend mercy to them.

In Nahum, the demands of God's justice fall on Nineveh. Well over a century had elapsed from the days of Jonah, and Nineveh had reverted to its former cruelty. In the destruction that overwhelmed the once proud and self-confident city, there is a solemn reminder to all the nations of the earth that God will demand that they answer for their conduct before his judgment seat.

Habakkuk approaches the matter of God's just demands from a different angle. We find the prophet agonising over the fact that he cannot understand the way in which God acts to procure justice on earth. He knows God cannot tolerate evil and treachery, and yet he is raising up the merciless Babylonians to punish his people for their sin. Habakkuk is



assured that eventually God will intervene to punish and overthrow the oppressor of his people. He is enjoined to wait with the confidence of a patient faith, for then he will see that whatever puzzles and seeming inequities God's justice throws up in this life, all the earth should be respectfully silent before the holy and sovereign God until he resolves the difficulties that have been encountered.

Like Micah, Zephaniah is acutely aware of the evil and corruption that prevailed in his day. He presents a stark picture of the coming reality of the great day of the LORD to shock the indifferent out of their spiritual lethargy. If all the nations are expected to fall under the scrutiny of the universal Judge, how can his own people possibly think they are going to be exempt. But Zephaniah also presents another side to the exercise of divine justice. It is designed not only to punish those who are obstinately wicked, but also to reclaim and purify. Beyond the impending outpouring of wrath there is a picture of God's provision for his people a provision which is shown to extend beyond the remnant of Israel. The blessings of divine restoration are presented to allure the wayward people back to the paths of covenant loyalty before it is too late to escape the just sentence on their misdeeds.

All humanity and every aspect of human conduct are subject to the requirements that God imposes on it. We have a fatally flawed view of him if we suppose that he is unaware of our behaviour or indifferent to it. There is no ultimate evasion of his just demands on us. Since all have sinned and failed to live up to the demands of God (Rom. 3:9-23), the final destiny of humanity would inevitably have been one of eternal punishment, had not God spontaneously and graciously provided a remedy. Salvation is possible only because God has permitted the penalty of his judgment to fall on a substitute, his own Son. He paid the price in the place of his people. It is only in this way that the demands of God's justice could be met and salvation provided for fallen humanity. Eternal life involves not only knowing and acknowledging God's just demands, but also knowing Jesus Christ, whom the Father sent, as the one who can effectively deal with the situation that arises when we fail to meet those demands.





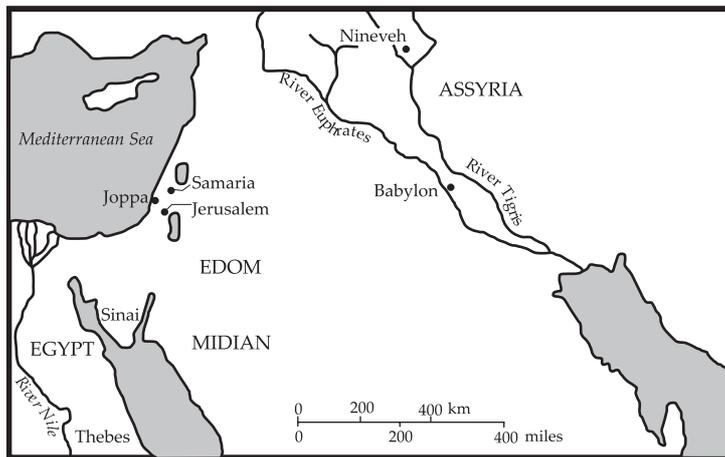
Outline of Major Events

BC

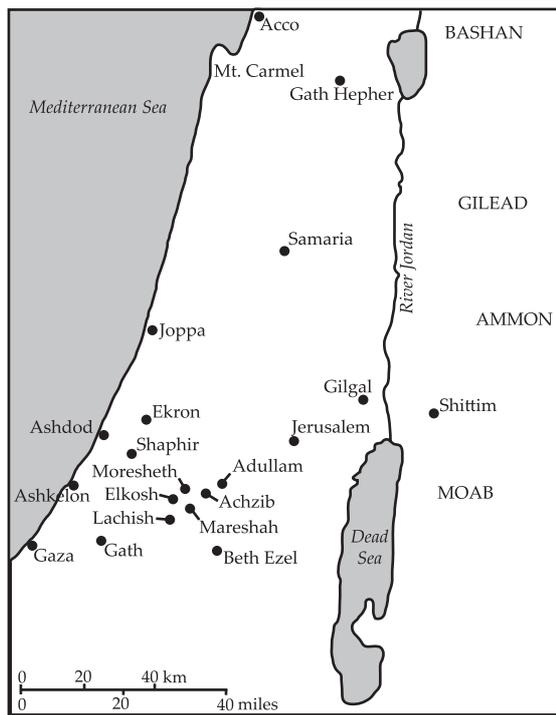
- 853 Battle of Qarqar: Assyria meets coalition of western forces, including Ahab of Israel.
- 780–755 *Ministry of Jonah.*
- 773–754 Ashur-dan III of Assyria. Time of Assyrian weakness.
- 745–727 Tiglath-Pileser III of Assyria. Resurgence of Assyrian power.
- 722 Fall of Samaria. End of Northern Kingdom of Israel.
- 715–690 *Ministry of Micah.*
- 701 Sennacherib of Assyria threatens Jerusalem.
- 696–642 Reign of Manasseh. Period of Assyrian domination and religious apostasy in Judah.
- 663 Capture of Thebes in Egypt. Height of Assyrian power.
- 655–635 *Ministry of Nahum.*
- 640–609 Josiah rules in Judah. Period of religious reform.
- 630–625 *Ministry of Zephaniah.*
- 612 Fall of Nineveh. Rise of Babylonians.
- 610–600 *Ministry of Habakkuk.*
- 605 Battle of Carchemish in which Babylon routs Egypt and becomes dominant power in the Middle East.
- 586 Fall of Jerusalem.
- 

KINGS OF ISRAEL	KINGS OF JUDAH	KINGS OF ASSYRIA
<p>Omri 885–874 Ahab 874–853 Ahaziah 853–852 Joram 852–841 Jehu 841–814 Jehoahaz 814–798 Jehoash 798–782 Jeroboam II 793–753 Zechariah 753 Shallum 752 Menahem 752–742 Pekahiah 742–740 Pekah 752–732 Hoshea 732–722</p>	<p>Uzziah 792–740 Jotham 750–731 Ahaz 735–715 Hezekiah 729–686 Manasseh 696–642 Amon 642–640 Josiah 640–609 Jehoahaz 609 Jehoiakim 608–598 Jehoiachin 598–597 Zedekiah 597–586</p>	<p>Shalmaneser III 858–824 Shamsi-Adad V 824–810 Adad-nirari III 810–782 Shalmaneser IV 782–773 Ashur-dan III 773–754 Adad-nirari V 754–745 Tiglath-pileser III 745–727 Shalmaneser V 727–722 Sargon II 722–705 Sennacherib 705–681 Esarhaddon 681–669 Ashurbanipal 669–626 Ashur-etil-ilani 626–623 Sin-shum-lishir 623 Sin-shar-ishkun 623–612 Ashur-uballit 612–608</p>





ANCIENT NEAR EAST



PALESTINE

