

Nahum

Scripture: Nahum

Code: MSB34

Title

The book's title is taken from the prophet of God's oracle against Nineveh, the capital of Assyria. Nahum means "comfort" or "consolation" and is a short form of Nehemiah ("comfort of Yahweh"). Nahum is not quoted in the NT, although there may be an allusion to Nah. 1:15 in Rom. 10:15 (cf. Is. 52:7).

Author and Date

The significance of the writing prophets was not their personal lives; it was their message. Thus, background information about the prophet from within the prophecy is rare. Occasionally one of the historical books will shed additional light. In the case of Nahum, nothing is provided except that he was an Elkoshite (1:1), referring either to his birthplace or his place of ministry. Attempts to identify the location of Elkosh have been unsuccessful. Suggestions include Al Qosh, situated in northern Iraq (thus Nahum would have been a descendant of the exiles taken to Assyria in 722 B.C.), Capernaum ("town of Nahum"), or a location in southern Judah (cf. 1:15). His birthplace or locale is not significant to the interpretation of the book.

With no mention of any kings in the introduction, the date of Nahum's prophecy must be implied by historical data. The message of judgment against Nineveh portrays a nation of strength, intimating a time not only prior to her fall in 612 B.C. but probably before the death of Ashurbanipal in 626 B.C., after which Assyria's power fell rapidly. Nahum's mention of the fall of No Amon, also called Thebes (3:8–10), in 663 B.C. (at the hands of Ashurbanipal) appears to be fresh in their minds and there is no mention of the rekindling that occurred ten years later, suggesting a mid-seventh century B.C. date during the reign of Manasseh (ca. 695–642 B.C.; cf. 2 Kin. 21:1–18).

Background and Setting

A century after Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah, she returned to idolatry, violence, and arrogance (3:1–4). Assyria was at the height of her power, having recovered from Sennacherib's defeat (701 B.C.) at Jerusalem (cf. Is. 37:36–38). Her borders extended all the way into Egypt. Esarhaddon had recently transplanted conquered peoples into Samaria and Galilee in 670 B.C. (cf. 2 Kin. 17:24; Ezra 4:2), leaving Syria and Palestine very weak. But God brought Nineveh down under the rising power of Babylon's king Nabopolassar and his son, Nebuchadnezzar (ca. 612 B.C.). Assyria's demise turned out just as God had prophesied.

Historical and Theological Themes

Nahum forms a sequel to the book of Jonah, who prophesied over a century earlier. Jonah recounts

the remission of God's promised judgment toward Nineveh, while Nahum depicts the later execution of God's judgment. Nineveh was proud of her invulnerable city, with her walls reaching 100 ft. high and with a moat 150 ft. wide and 60 ft. deep; but Nahum established the fact that the sovereign God (1:2–5) would bring vengeance upon those who violated His law (1:8,14; 3:5–7). The same God had a retributive judgment against evil which is also redemptive, bestowing His loving kindnesses upon the faithful (cf. 1:7,12,13,15; 2:2). The prophecy brought comfort to Judah and all who feared the cruel Assyrians. Nahum said Nineveh would end "with an overflowing flood" (1:8); and it happened when the Tigris River overflowed to destroy enough of the walls to let the Babylonians through. Nahum also predicted that the city would be hidden (3:11). After its destruction in 612 B.C., the site was not rediscovered until 1842 A.D.

Interpretive Challenges

Apart from the uncertain identity of Elkosh (cf. Introduction: Author and Date), the prophecy presents no real interpretive difficulties. The book is a straightforward prophetic announcement of judgment against Assyria and her capital Nineveh for cruel atrocities and idolatrous practices.

Outline

I. Superscription (1:1)

II. Destruction of Nineveh Declared (1:2–15)

A. God's Power Illustrated (1:2–8)

B. God's Punishment Stated (1:9–15)

III. Destruction of Nineveh Detailed (2:1–13)

A. The City is Assaulted (2:1–10)

B. The City is Discredited (2:11–13)

IV. Destruction of Nineveh Demanded (3:1–19)

A. The First Charge (3:1–3)

B. The Second Charge (3:4–7)

C. The Third Charge (3:8–19)

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