

Book of Nahum

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 New Testament, although there may be an allusion to (Nahum 1:15 in Romans 10:15; Isaiah 52:7).

Author – Date:

The author of the prophecy is named simply "Nahum the Elkoshite" (1:1), and all that is known of the prophet is gleaned from this prophecy.

Probably the identity of the prophet is obscured so his message can be prominent.

Nahum's mission was to comfort the kingdom of Judah, following the destruction of Israel by Assyria, by announcing God's coming judgment on Nineveh, the capital of Assyria.

The purpose of Nahum's prophecy is twofold:

- (1) To deliver a message of judgment and destruction against Nineveh; and
- (2) To give comfort to Judah, so recently ravaged by Assyria.

Since Assyria is doomed, it will constitute a threat no longer.

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.

Being occupied with the doom on Nineveh, Nahum does not date his prophecy according to any of the kings of Israel or Judah.

He probably ministered during the reign of Hezekiah.

This would certainly fit if (1:9-13), is understood as a vivid description of Sennacherib's invasion of Judah and siege of Jerusalem.

The only historical citation that can be identified with certainty is the references to “No” (No-amon, i.e., Egyptian Thebes), which was destroyed by Assyria (in 663 B.C.; 3:8-10).

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 (695-642 B.C.; compare 2 Kings 21:1-18).

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 or a location in southern Judah (1:15).

It may be identified with Capernaum (Kaphar Nahum, literally, “Village of Nahum”), which was renamed in honor of its most famous citizen.

Probably then, Nahum was born in Galilee, but during Israel’s defection moved to Judah and in Jerusalem took up his ministry in behalf of Judah against Nineveh.

His birthplace or locale is not significant to the interpretation of the book.

Historical Setting:

The place from which the prophet ministered is best understood as Jerusalem, which so recently had experienced near destruction by Sennacherib, king of Assyria.

Its siege and divine intervention is briefly described (in 1:9-13).

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.

The prophet cites Nineveh’s destruction of No-amon and points out that if God did not spare that city, then He certainly would not spare Nineveh, for Nineveh is not better than Thebes (See verses 3:11-15a).

Thus, it can be determined with certainty that the prophecy was written after the destruction of Thebes, which it records, and before the destruction of Nineveh which it predicts.

Nineveh was destroyed (in 612 B.C.).

Background – 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 (Isa. 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.; 2 Kings 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 (612 B.C.).

Assyria's demise turned out just as God had prophesied.

The prophecy of Nahum is dominated by a single idea, the doom of Nineveh.

In describing this doom, Nahum writes lyric poetry of the highest quality.

It has been called the most poetical of all the prophetic writings, and certainly is the most severe in tone of any of the Minor Prophets.

Historical – 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 feet high and with a moat 150 feet wide and 60 feet 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 (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.).