

7. Nahum 650-612 B.C. (written in 612)

The book of Nahum has three chapters. It is a Gentile prophecy book.

Author

Nothing is known of Nahum except his name, means “comfort” or “consolation.” His name fits his prophecy, an intended comfort for Judah.

Date

Here are the significant dates surrounding the writing of the book of Nahum:

- 722, Sargon II of Assyria conquered Israel
- 701, Sennacherib surrounded Jerusalem, but forced to return home when God killed 185,000 Assyrians
- 695, Manasseh, who *shed very much innocent blood* (2 Kings 21:16) became king in Judah
- 663, Thebes (called *No-amon by the waters of the Nile*) fell to Ashurbanipal, recorded in Nahum 3:8
- 612, Nineveh, capitol of Assyria, fell to Babylon
- 605, Babylon and some allies conquered Carchemish, defeating Egypt with the last remnant of Assyrians, and carried some Jews, including Ezekiel and Daniel, into the Babylonian Exile
- 586, Babylon conquered Judah and destroyed Jerusalem along with Solomon’s Temple

Most relevant for determining the date of Nahum is that he records the fall of Thebes, Egypt which happened in 663, and he predicted the fall of Nineveh, which happened in 612. So the book had to be written between 663 and 612. A good estimate would be between 650 and 612.

Background

Nahum’s message was about the destruction of Nineveh, the capitol city of Assyria. The Northern Kingdom of Israel had already been destroyed, and its population deported to Assyria, in 722 B.C. (2 Kings 17:3-6). Assyria also had destroyed many Judean cities. Nahum’s prophecy was a comforting message for the remaining Jews in Judah who were presently living under the threat of Assyrian control.

Key Verse

A jealous and avenging God is the LORD; The LORD is avenging and wrathful. The LORD takes vengeance on His adversaries, And He reserves wrath for His enemies (1:2)

Purpose

The purpose of the book of Nahum is to let the people of Judah know that, although the Assyrians had captured Israel, God would destroy their capitol of Nineveh. Judah should know that God was the ultimate Ruler of all the nations of the world, not just theirs.

Theme

Subject: A jealous, avenging, wrathful God

Complement: will bring a just judgment to all the earth

Outline

The Author and His Purpose, 1:1

The Wrath of God, 1:2-7

The Lord's Plans for Nineveh and Judah, 1:8-14

The Lord's Judgment on Nineveh, 1:15–3:19

Commentary

The Author and His Purpose, 1:1

The oracle of Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite. The book is called both an oracle, meaning a burden or heavy message, and a vision. A vision is not a dream but a revelation given under some special circumstances while the prophet is awake (as in Revelation 1:10). Nahum is called an Elkoshite. Many speculate that this is an ancient name for Capernaum (“Town of Nahum”), but there is no proof of this.

The Wrath of God, 1:2-7

Verses 2-3a, *A jealous and avenging God is the LORD; the LORD is avenging and wrathful. The LORD takes vengeance on His adversaries, and He reserves wrath for His enemies. The LORD is slow to anger and great in power, and the LORD will by no means leave the guilty unpunished.*

God is presented as:

- *Jealous*, not tolerating the worship of other gods, even in non-Jewish nations
- *Avenging*, balancing the scales of justice
- *Wrathful*, bringing judgment on those who violate His character
- *Slow to anger*, assuring a certainty of judgment when judgment does not seem immanent

The Lord's Plans for Nineveh and Judah, 1:8-14

Verse 14, *The LORD has issued a command concerning you: “Your name will no longer be perpetuated. I will cut off idol and image from the house of your gods. I will prepare your grave, for you are contemptible.”* The Lord's jealous judgment against idols and temple images was not only against Israel and Judah, who had the Law of Moses. This verse tells us God's omniscience includes knowing all the evil of all the religions of all the nations.

The Lord's Judgment on Nineveh, 1:15–3:19

Verse 1:15, *Behold, on the mountains the feet of him who brings good news, Who announces peace! Celebrate your feasts, O Judah; pay your vows. For never again will the wicked one [referring to the Assyrians] pass through you; He is cut off completely.* The destruction of Nineveh, by the Babylonians and the Medes (which happened in A.D. 612), was actually the work of God, and it would be good news for Judah.

Verses 2:1-2, *For the LORD will restore the splendor of Jacob like the splendor of Israel, even though devastators have devastated them and destroyed their vine branches.* The description of Nineveh is interrupted by a statement of future restoration of both Israel and Judah (Jacob), who are seen as God's possession, His *vine branches*.

Verses 3-10, *The chariots race madly in the streets, they rush wildly in the squares, their appearance is like torches, they dash to and fro like lightning flashes* (verse 4). From Nahum's description, we can almost hear the sounds of battle as Nineveh is destroyed.

Verses 11-13, *Where is the den of the lions and the feeding place of the young lions, where the lion, lioness and lion's cub prowled, with nothing to disturb them* (verse 11)? Assyria has plundered other nations, like lions, to feed its own people. But now the lion's den will be destroyed. "The illustration is particularly appropriate, since lions in various forms are found on Assyrian sculptures." [Ryrie Study Bible]

Verses 3:1-7, *Woe to the bloody city* (verse 1)... *All because of the many harlotries of the harlot, the charming one, the mistress of sorceries, who sells nations by her harlotries and families by her sorceries* (verse 3). Nineveh was a city of cruel physical bloodshed, sorceries, and harlotries. Maier described Nineveh as a city of

...atrocious practice of cutting off hands and feet, ears and noses, gouging out eyes, lopping off heads, and then binding them to vines or heaping them up before city gates [and] the utter fiendishness by which captives could be impaled or flayed alive through a process in which their skin was gradually and completely removed." [Maier, *The Book of Nahum: A Commentary*, p. 292]

Verses 8-10, *Are you better than No-amon, which was situated by the waters of the Nile, with water surrounding her, whose rampart was the sea, whose wall consisted of the sea? Ethiopia was her might, and Egypt too, without limits* (verses 8-9a). No-amon (the city of Amon) is Thebes, the capitol city of northern Egypt. It was located on the Nile River, as Nineveh was located on Tigris River. Thebes counted on their Egyptian allies to help, but like what will happen to Nineveh in 722, it was destroyed in 663.

Verses 11-19, *There is no relief for your breakdown* (better translated, your "bruises" or "fractures"), *your wound is incurable. All who hear about you will clap their hands over you, for on whom has not your evil passed continually* (verse 19). When they are under attack by the Medes, Scythians, and Babylonians, the formerly dreaded Assyrians of Nineveh would find that its fortresses were weak. The city that had increased in wealth by commerce and power by cruelty, is no match for the destruction coming from the hand of the Lord.

"Behold, I am against you," declares the LORD of hosts (2:13; 3:5).

An Application

We should understand that God, the real God, the God of the Bible, is a jealous, avenging, wrathful God who will bring a just judgment to all the earth. When it looks like our enemies, evil nations and governments are getting away with their evil, know and understand, and be comforted by the fact that God will judge those nations, governments, and enemies of truth and righteousness, with the wrath of justice.