

NAHUM

Introduction

Author. We know nothing about the prophet Nahum beyond what is written in the book he has left us. He was an accomplished poet (the short prophecy against Ninevah is considered to be some of the highest quality Hebrew poetry) and a native of Elkosh (1:1). Unfortunately, the exact location of Elkosh is impossible to determine. His name is in the passive form, "comforted" which describes the intended effect of the prophecy for the nation of Judah.

Date. The terminus a quo of the book is 663 B. C., the date of the fall of Thebes to Assurbanipal which is mentioned by Nahum in 3:8-9. The terminus ad quem can be fixed at 612 with the fall of Ninevah. Because the fall of Ninevah seems to be imminent throughout the book many have assigned a late date of 620-615. Others observe that Assyria seems to be at the apex of her power at the time of the writing and that the language of imminency of defeat can be attributed to the graphic style of the prophet. This would push the date back to the time of Manasseh of Judah, approximately 650 B. C. Whatever the date may be, Nahum was not simply an astute political observer who could forecast the obvious. He was a prophet of Yahweh speaking the words of God through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Historical Background. Nahum's prophecy, like Jonah's, involved the Assyrian capital Ninevah. However, Jonah's message which was preached to the city was met with national repentance. There is no indication that Nahum's prophecy was preached to, nor even intended for the benefit of, Assyria. Rather it seems designed to comfort Judah with the realization that Assyria would indeed be judged for her sin. Assyria conquered and exiled the northern kingdom in 722 B. C. and devastated Judah in 701, capturing 46 cities and besieging Jerusalem. Assyria was infamous for her horrible cruelty in warfare, which was expressed at its worst under Assurbanipal. The leaders of conquered cities were tortured and horribly mutilated before being executed (3:3). She remained a threat until the times of Josiah when she began her decline about 627. Ninevah, the capital city fell under the combined attack of the Medes and Babylonians

in 612. Haran, the provincial capital fell in 610 and Assyria's final defeat occurred at Carchemish in 609.

Form. Neither Judah nor Ninevah are heard speaking in the book. The only dialogue occurs between God and the prophet. Nahum's work is almost entirely poetry. The contents are primarily judgment oracles expressed in intense moods, sights and sounds. It is highly picturesque so that although the prophecy is clearly future it is described as transpiring right before the eyes of his audience (2:3-7; 3:1-7). The scenes with all their visual horror give an immediacy and reality to divine judgment which mere threats and declarations cannot give. The fact of judgment is present in the book but it is the vivid reality of judgment which Nahum seeks to bring to his audience.

Message Statement. The thesis of Nahum's prophecy is tightly focused upon the doom of Ninevah. While Judah herself is undoubtedly worthy of judgment at this time (cf. Jeremiah's assessment during this time period) Nahum has nothing condemning to say to her besides the mild admonitions to "Celebrate your feasts, O Judah;" and "Pay your vows" in light of God's judgment on Assyria (1:15). Because of this positive application to Judah and because it appears that the message was never intended for the benefit of Ninevah (as was Jonah's prophecy) it appears that the intent of the book is to comfort and encourage Judah with the prediction of Ninevah's demise. Yahweh's universal sovereignty over the nations is thus proclaimed and His special care for Judah is underscored.

The book is divided into three basic divisions. It begins with a statement of the dual nature of God as avenger of the wicked and savior of the righteous (1:1-8). The next division applies these facts to the historical situation involving Assyria and Judah (1:9--2:2). The final division focuses tightly upon the graphic description of Ninevah. The message may best be summarized as: *God's vengeance on, and judgment of, Ninevah reflects his concern and mercy for Israel.*

Argument

- 1A GOD'S CHARACTER AS AVENGER AND SAVIOR STATED 1:2-8
The book opens with a statement of God's vengeance upon the wicked (1:2-3a). Not only is God opposed to wickedness but He also has the power and sovereignty to impose judgment on the wicked (1:3b-6). This section closes however with the balancing principle that although God will destroy the wicked (1:8), he is a refuge to the righteous (1:7). These two verses serve as a transition to the second division which applies them alternately (three times) to Judah and Assyria (1:9--2:2).
- 2A GOD'S CHARACTER MANIFESTED IN VENGEANCE ON ASSYRIA AND

MERCY ON JUDAH

1:9--2:2

This section consists of three sets of declarations of vengeance against Ninevah with the balancing application of comfort for Judah. First the completeness of Ninevah's doom is stated (1:9-13) followed by the positive implications for Judah (1:14). The second declaration considers the permanence of Ninevah's end (1:14) followed by the implications for Judah (1:15) in terms reminiscent of the Isaianic celebration of freedom from the oppressor (Isa 52:7). And the third declaration states the imminency, or perhaps vivid reality, of the coming invasion with a balancing message of comfort for Judah. With the vengeance/mercy theme covered, the author next concentrates on the vivid portrayal of the destruction of Assyria in the third division.

3A GOD'S CHARACTER MANIFESTED IN THE FALL OF NINEVAH

2:3--3:19

The final division of the book contains the most explicit accounts of the city's fall. The first sketch is found in 2:3-9. The mention of colors and action provide vivid imagery. This is followed by a taunt of the city, which is couched in literal and figurative terms (2:10-12). The second spirited portrait of the city's defeat is found in 2:13--3:7. This section contains the two explicit statements of Yahweh "Behold I am against you, declares the Lord," (2:13 and 3:5). The description here is both literal (3:1-3) and figurative (3:4-7). The rest of the book celebrates the hopelessness of the city. It is first compared to Thebes (3:8-13), a city which Assurbanipal destroyed in 663. It too was a proud city located on a river but it also fell and suffered a cruel defeat. The book concludes with a celebration of the city's hopelessness in a mock admonition to prepare for the siege (3:14-19). The trouble is that no amount of preparation will suffice. No amount of fortification (3:14-15a) or warriors (3:15b-17) will prevent the overthrow of the city. Finally, the king is taunted as one last insult to the wicked nation (3:18-19).

Outline

1A	GOD'S CHARACTER AS AVENGER AND SAVIOR STATED	1:2-8
1B	<u>Introduction</u>	1:1
2B	<u>His Character</u>	
1C	His Vengeance	1:2-3a
2C	His Universal Sovereignty	1:3b-6
3B	<u>The Implications (transitional section)</u>	1:7-8
1C	For Judah	1:7
2C	For Assyria	1:8
2A	GOD'S CHARACTER MANIFESTED IN VENGEANCE ON ASSYRIA AND MERCY ON JUDAH	1:9--2:2
1B	<u>Declaration #1</u>	1:9-13
1C	Judgment on Assyria: The Completeness of Her End	1:9-11
2C	Mercy for Judah: Her Freedom from Assyria	1:12-13
2B	<u>Declaration #2</u>	1:14-15
1C	Judgment on Assyria: The Permanence of Her End	1:14
2C	Mercy for Judah: Permanent Protection from Assyria	1:15
3B	<u>Declaration #3</u>	2:1-2
1C	Judgment on Assyria: The Imminence of Her End	2:1
2C	Mercy for Judah: Restoration to Splendor	2:2
3A	GOD'S CHARACTER MANIFESTED IN THE FALL OF NINEVAH	2:3--3:19
1B	<u>Description of the Siege and Defeat of Ninevah</u>	2:3-9
1C	The desperation	2:3-5
2C	The destruction	2:6-7
3C	The aftermath	2:8-9
1D	The residents	2:8
2D	The attackers	2:9
2B	<u>Taunt Against the Defeated City</u>	2:10-12
1C	Stated	2:10

2C	Pictured	2:11-12
3B	<u>Description of the Defeat of Ninevah</u>	2:13--3:7
1C	Literal statement	2:13--3:3
1D	Statement of Yahweh: "I am against you"	2:13
2D	Description	3:1-3
2C	Figurative statement	3:4-7
1D	Basis for judgment	3:4
2D	Statement of Yahweh: "I am against you"	3:5a
3D	Results of judgment	3:5b-7
4B	<u>The Hopelessness of the City</u>	3:8-19
1C	Comparison of Ninevah to Thebes	3:8-13
1D	Description of Thebes	3:8-10
1E	Her protection: a river	3:8
2E	Her support	3:9
3E	Her destruction	3:10
2D	Application to Ninevah	3:11-13
2C	Sarcastic Address to Prepare for the Enemy	3:14-17
1D	Concerning fortifications	3:14-15a
1E	Admonition to preparation	3:14
2E	Futility of preparation	3:15a
2D	Concerning people	3:15b-17
1E	Admonition to Preparation	3:15b-16
2E	Futility of preparation	3:17
3C	Specific address to the King	3:18-19