

NAME

The book is named after its author, the prophet Nahum of Elkosh. (Nahum 1:1)

Mitchell:

The Name "Nahum" means, "Comforter or consoler." At first glance, this might seem a poor name for a book that deals with God's wrath on Nineveh. However, Nineveh's destruction would bring comfort to the fearful down-trodden peoples of the Near East. They had been under the dreaded heel of the Assyrians for over 200 years. As the prophets gave this message, one can imagine that the people gave a sigh of, "At last."

AUTHOR

We know very little of the man who wrote this prophecy. His name is in the word "Capernaum" which means village of Nahum. Perhaps this indicates that he was a resident or perhaps the founder of the village. Perhaps Nahum was left behind when Sargon conquered the northern kingdom. Both Eusebius and Jerome speculated in this regard. However, there are no remains in the area of Capernaum from the 7th century B.C. and thus no proof to substantiate this speculation.

The location of Elkosh (Nahum 1:1) is unknown. According to Halley, since the 16th century an Arab tradition has identified Elkosh with Al Ovosh, a village near modern Mosul (ancient Nineveh) in Iraq (Halley, page 431). However, given the date (below) and the specific address to Judah (Nahum 1:15) it is probable that Nahum was from Judah or at least ministering there.

DATE

The below is adapted from Mitchell and the NASB Introduction to Nahum:

At the time Nahum uttered this prophecy, Assyria had reached the zenith of its power.

Assyria (represented by Nineveh [Nahum 1:1]) under Shalmaneser II and Sargon had already destroyed Samaria (722-721 B.C.), resulting in the captivity of the northern kingdom of Israel and a tax levied on the southern kingdom. Assyria posed a constant threat to Judah. Were it not for the prayers of King Hezekiah (715-686 B.C.), the next Assyrian king, Sennacherib, would have taken Jerusalem (Isaiah 36-39). Later, Esarhaddon I led a victorious army into Egypt and enroute stopped at Jerusalem long enough to make King Manasseh (697-642 B.C.) his prisoner (2 Chronicles 33). Ashurbanipal, the next king, was even more distinguished than any of his predecessors in extending and strengthening the empire.

The metropolitan area of Nineveh was 30 miles long and 10 miles wide. It was protected by five walls and three moats, built by the forced labor of unnumbered thousands of foreign captives. The main part of the city was 3 miles long and 1½ miles wide. Its walls were 100 feet high and wide enough on top for four chariots to be raced abreast. Its population has been estimated from between 600,000 to 1,000,000 (at least 120,000 - Jonah 4:11). Nineveh was the Queen city of the earth, the very center of the world's commerce and wealth making Nahum's prophecies hard to believe.

The Assyrians were brutally cruel, their kings often being depicted as gloating over the gruesome punishments inflicted on conquered peoples. They conducted their wars with shocking ferocity, uprooted whole populations as state policy and deported them to other parts of their empire. The leaders of conquered cities were tortured and horribly mutilated before being executed.

The Assyrian king Shalmaneser III boasted of erecting a pyramid of chopped-off heads in front of an enemy's city. Other Assyrian kings stacked corpses like cordwood by the gates of defeated cities. Nahum's description of the cruel Assyrians (3:3) is apropos. No wonder the dread of Assyria fell on her neighbors.

About 700 B.C. King Sennacherib made Nineveh the capital of the Assyrian Empire, and it remained the capital until it was destroyed in 612 B.C. Jonah had announced its destruction earlier (Jonah 3:4), but the people repented and the destruction was temporarily averted. Not long after that, however, Nineveh reverted to its extreme wickedness, brutality, and pride. The brutality reached its peak under Ashurbanipal (669-627 B.C.), the last great ruler of the Assyrian Empire. After his death, Assyria's influence and power waned rapidly until 612, when Nineveh was overthrown. God used the Babylonians under Nabopolassar, the Medes under Cyaxares, and the Scythians (invasion in 626 B.C.) to dig Nineveh's grave in 612 B.C.

In 3:8-10 the author speaks of the fall of Thebes (Hebrew name: No-Amon), which happened in 663 B.C., as already past. In all three chapters Nahum prophesied Nineveh's fall, which was fulfilled in 612 B.C. Nahum therefore uttered this oracle between 663 and 612, perhaps near the end of this period since he represents the fall of Nineveh as imminent (2:1; 3:14,19). This would place him during the reign of Josiah (641-601 B.C.) and make him a contemporary of Zephaniah (627 B.C.) who also predicted the fall of Nineveh (Zephaniah 2:13-15) and the young Jeremiah (626-585 B.C.). He prophesied during the reign of the wicked Judean King Manasseh (697-642 B.C.). He was a contemporary with Habakkuk (607 B.C.).

THEME

Halley (Page 44): *"Destruction of Nineveh"*

Mitchell: *"Though God's Wrath May Be Slow, It Is None-The-Less Certain and Devastating."*

Mitchell:

Two of God's prophets deal with Nineveh, the great capital of the Assyrian Empire. Jonah prophesied about 770 B.C. Hence the prophets were about 150 years apart. In those intervening 135 years, the Ten Northern Tribes had been carried into captivity and God patiently gave the Ninevites opportunity to repent (1:3), but now the day of grace had ended, and the moment of doom had arrived (3:19). Assyria had served God's purpose (Isaiah 10:5) and would be destroyed.

This book should bring much comfort in these days. In our own days as then, proud civilizations (like the Assyrians) are staking everything on "arms" races and economic warfare. There is monstrous disregard of God and His sovereignty. But before history is complete, men and nations will learn that God is on the throne and still running the show.

The accuracy of Nahum's predictions were verified almost 40 years later, and are historically verifiable. Nahum writes in classic Hebrew poetic style, exceedingly fine and vivid in descriptions. His tone is terrible in the highest degree.

Key Word (Nelson's): The Judgment of Nineveh - If ever a city deserved the title "Here to Stay," Nineveh was that city. But Nahum declares that Nineveh will fall.

Key Verses (Nelson's):

"The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; He knows those who take refuge in Him. But with an overflowing flood He will make a complete end of the adversaries, and will pursue His enemies into darkness" (Nahum 1:7,8).

"Behold, I am against you, declares the Lord of hosts, and will lift up your skirts over your face; and I will make nations look at your nakedness and kingdoms at your shame. I will throw filth at you and treat you with contempt and make you a spectacle. And all who look at you will shrink from you and say, Wasted is Nineveh; who will grieve for her? Where shall I seek comforters for you?" (Nahum 3:5-7)

Key Chapter (Nelson's): 1 - Nahum 1:2-8 portrays the patience, power, holiness, and justice of the living God. He is slow to wrath, but God settles His accounts in full. This book concerns the downfall of Assyria, but it is written for the benefit of the surviving kingdom of Judah.

Outline:

- I. Nineveh's Doom Declared 1
God is a jealous God and furious in revenge
 - A. The Judge 1:1-7
The God of vengeance
 - B. The Judgment 1:8-15
The vengeance of God
- II. Nineveh's Doom Described 2
God's wrath in action
 - A. The Storming of the City 2:1-8
 - B. The Plundering of the City 2:9-13
- III. Nineveh's Doom Deserved 3
Awful wickedness

RECIPIENTS

NASB - Introduction to Nahum:

Some words are addressed to Judah (see 1:12-13,15), but most are addressed to Nineveh (see 1:11, 14; 2:1,13; 3:5-17,19) or its king (3:18). The book, however, was meant for Judahite readers. And us...

CONTRIBUTION TO CANON

1. God's anger is slow but disastrous (complete)
2. Difference between God's judgment of the Gentiles and the Jews is that with the Jews there is always a promise of ultimate redemption
3. An example of how God deals with the nations - Nineveh is an example. Nahum expands our world view to include God as the God of the whole world not just Israel. Nahum declares the universal sovereignty of God. God is the Lord of history and of all nations; as such He controls their destinies.

4. God's righteous and just kingdom will ultimately triumph, for kingdoms built on wickedness and tyranny must eventually fall, as Assyria did.
5. God is not only kind but stern (Romans 11:22)

ESV - Introduction to Nahum:

Although God had used the Assyrians to chasten the wayward southern kingdom, He did not allow Judah to be annihilated. God's plan, that the Messiah would come from the line of David, would not be thwarted. The religious feasts of Judah, which God encouraged them to keep (Nahum 1:15), would have reminded them of the future Savior.

RESOURCES

Gromacki, Robert C. *New Testament Survey*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Baker Book House, 1978

Halley, Henry H. *Halley's Bible Handbook*, Grand Rapids, Michigan; Zondervan Publishing House

Horton, David, General Editor. *The Portable Seminary*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Bethany House Publishers, 2006

Nelson's Quick Reference - Bible Maps And Charts, Nashville, Tennessee; Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1994

As general resources I've relied on my class notes from various professors at Biola University (especially those of Dr. Curtis Mitchell), Western Conservative Baptist Seminary (WCBS), and Talbot Seminary as well as notes shared with me by Annie Kartoizian.

Additional reference material has come from the study Bibles of the English Standard Version, New American Standard Version, and The New Living Translation.

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