

Nahum

Nineveh was a city built to last. Surrounded by high walls, fortified with two hundred towers, encircled by a deep moat, it was truly an invincible and impregnable fortress; or so the Ninevites thought! But according to the prophet Nahum, the proud city and its inhabitants would be powerless to stand before God's coming wrath. In the 150 years since Jonah's remarkable revival, the people of Nineveh had returned to their defiant, immoral ways. Nahum's preaching is not a call to repentance (like Jonah's), but a decree of death for an evil people who have "worn out" the patience of God.

INTRODUCTION

"For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required" (Luke 12:48). Nineveh had been given the privilege of knowing the one true God. Under Jonah's preaching this great gentile city had repented, and God had graciously stayed His judgment. However, a hundred years later, Nahum proclaims the downfall of this same city. The Assyrians have forgotten their revival and have returned to their habits of violence, idolatry, and arrogance. As a result, Babylon will completely destroy the city so that no trace of it will remain; a prophecy fulfilled in painful detail.

The Hebrew word *nahum* ("comfort, consolation") is a shortened form of Nehemiah ("Comfort of Yahweh"). The destruction of the capital city of Assyria is a message of comfort and consolation to Judah and all who live in fear of the cruelty of the Assyrians.

AUTHOR

The only mention of Nahum in the Old Testament is found in chapter 1, verse 1, where he is called an Elkoshite. There are four presumed locations for Elkosh:

1. A sixteenth-century tradition identifies Elkosh with Al-Qush in Iraq, north of the site of Nineveh on the Tigris River.
2. Jerome believed that Elkesi, a city near Ramah in Galilee, was Elkosh because of the similarity of the consonants.
3. Capernaum means "City of Nahum" (Kephars-Nahum), and many believe that the name Elkosh was changed to Capernaum in Nahum's honor.
4. Most scholars believe that Elkosh was a city of southern Judah (later called Elcesei) between Jerusalem and Gaza.

This would make Nahum a prophet of the southern kingdom and may explain his interest in the triumph of Judah (1:15; 2:2).

DATE & SETTING

The fall of Nineveh to the Babylonians in 612 b.c. is seen by Nahum as a future event. Critics who deny predictive prophecy naturally date Nahum after 612 b.c., but this is not based upon Biblical or historical considerations. Nahum (3:8-10) refers to the fall of Thebes as a recent event, so this book must be dated after 664 b.c., the year when this took place.

Nahum can safely be placed between 663 and 612 b.c. Thebes was restored a decade after its defeat, and Nahum's failure to mention this restoration has led several scholars to the conclusion that Nahum was written before 654 b.c. The fact that Nahum mentions no king in the introduction to his book (1:1) may point to the reign of the wicked King Manasseh (686-642 b.c.).