

Nahum

Overview and Summary

Author:

- ⇒ Verse one tells us that this book was written by a man named Nahum who was an Elkoshite.
 - The name Nahum comes from the root Hebrew word meaning “to comfort.” Therefore, Nahum’s name may refer to the Lord’s comfort or consolation.
 - The location of the city of Elkosh is uncertain to biblical scholars, but there have been several suggestions made. The first location is in Mesopotamia near the Tigris River and a city named Mosul where there is a town called Elqush which houses the “tomb of Nahum.” The second site was promoted by Jerome (342-420AD) and is near Galilee at a location named Elkesi. The third location is Capernaum in Galilee which means “the village of Nahum.” Lastly, a small town in Judah named Bir el-Kaus has been mentioned. However, there is no consensus by scholars.
- ⇒ We can tell that Nahum has a strong understanding of the political happenings of his day. This could be explained simply by divine inspiration, or it could be an indication that Nahum was in a place where he was able to hear the goings-on of other nations, he may have even lived near a common ancient highway of his day.

Date:

- ⇒ Unlike other prophets, Nahum does not date himself by listing the various kings who ruled during his prophetic ministry. Instead, we must look to the internal clues given by the author himself.
 - Clue #1 – In 3:8-10 Nahum mentions the fall of No-amon (Thebes). No-amon was the capital of Egypt, thought to be impregnable from outsiders, but in 663BC Assyria overtook the city. Because Nahum retells this as a past event, Nahum’s writing must have taken place sometime after 663BC.
 - Clue#2 – There is no mention of Assyria’s demise. The nation of Assyria persisted until 612BC when Ninevah was destroyed. Because Nahum does not mention this event at all and because his prophecy deals exclusively with Assyria, this prophecy must have occurred sometime before 612BC.
 - Clue #3 – Throughout Nahum’s prophecy Assyria is described as a powerful country, but after the death of the Assyrian leader Ashurbanipal Assyrian power began its downward decline. Therefore, it may be reasonable to assume that this book was written sometime before 627BC.

- ⇒ With the clues above, we may estimate that the date of Nahum's writing most likely took place between 663BC and 627BC.
- ⇒ Because of Nahum's fulfilled prophecy of Assyria's fall and Babylon's eventual rise, there are many who believe that Nahum must have been written much later, however this is only due to their unwillingness to accept the fact that as a prophet Nahum received divine inspiration for his prophecy.

Audience:

- ⇒ While uniquely written about the downfall of Assyria, this prophecy was not meant for Assyria, but instead it was written to Judah.
 - Jonah had prophesized to Assyria almost a century before Nahum, but since then Ninevah had forgotten about its repentance and had once again indulged themselves with sin and false worship.
 - Assyria had been the dominate powerhouse in the region since the reign of Tiglath-pileser III (745-727BC).
 - King Ahaz, when he was surrounded by the Israelite and Syrian armies, sent out for the help of Assyria in 734BC, making Judah into a vassal state of Assyria. From this point on (until 705BC) Judah had to pay a tribute tax to Assyria. It was not until King Hezekiah's reign that Judah stopped paying this tax.
 - Commentator Kenneth Barker says, "For the next one hundred years, Judah remained as a vassal of Assyria. Assyria's dominance, reinforced by ruthless military might, must have seemed to most people of the day to be an eternal fixture on the world scene. The power and permanence of Assyria made Nahum's message even more significant."
- ⇒ Assyria was at the height of it power and influence in the region during the ministry of Nahum, therefore Nahum's prophecy of their destruction would have seemed on one hand impossible, yet on the other hand a welcome reprieve from their oppressive reign.
- ⇒ Nahum's prophecy was designed to encourage Judah that God will enact justice on Assyria for their evil ways.

Structure & Content:

- ⇒ Mark Hitchcock divides the book of Nahum by each chapter: Nineveh's Destruction Declared (ch 1), Nineveh's Destruction Described (ch 2), & Nineveh's Destruction Deserved (ch 3). Other titles for this division include: Who will destroy Nineveh (ch 1), How will He destroy Nineveh (ch 2), & Why will He destroy Nineveh (ch 3).
- ⇒ Richard Fuhr and Gary Yates organize Nahum similarly, but suggest that chapter two and three form a chiasm with 3:1-4 as the center and emphasis.

- ⇒ Chapter 1: Nahum begins his prophecy describing the avenging wrath of God, who will not allow the guilty to go unpunished. God's strength and might is described by his omnipotence over nature ("Mountains quake because of Him and the hills dissolve; Indeed the earth is upheaved by His presence, the world and all the inhabitants in it" (v.5)). Though evil and sinful nations plot against the Lord, He promises to cut down their idols, cut off their name, and utterly destroy them.
- ⇒ Chapter 2: The Lord promises that the one who has come up against Jacob will be thwarted, so Judah is to be encouraged. Beginning in verse three through six we have a brief poetic description of the coming siege on Assyria by the Babylon forces. Followed by verse seven through ten which paints a picture of the aftermath of Assyria's downfall. Nahum describes Assyria as such: fleeing, plundered, emptied, and anguished. Finally, by using an analogy in verse eleven through thirteen, Nahum pictures Assyria as a lion who has been emptied of his den, with no place to call home any longer. Forcefully, Yahweh ends this chapter in verse thirteen by saying "Behold, I am against you."
- ⇒ Chapter 3: With the knowledge of God's power to judge and how God will judge Assyria, the final chapter in this book lays out the many reasons why God's judgment was necessary. Poetically we see that Assyria's judgment comes from three fronts: their false worship (vv. 4-7), their pride (vv. 8-15), and their desire for the things of this world (vv.16-19).

Message:

- ⇒ Nahum writes of a mighty God who will judge the wicked for their evil deeds. While God's people have been trodden over for years, God has taken notice and will give the oppressors their due judgment.
- ⇒ Judah is to be encouraged that God is on their side and that their oppressors will one day be thrown down.