

NAHUM

Outlined Bible

Personal Background

The name of this prophet --- *Nahum* --- means "comfort, consolation." It is a shortened form of *Nehemiah* which means "the comfort of Yahweh." This prophet is only mentioned once in the entire Bible (Nahum 1:1). His name "is in a sense symbolical of the message of the book, which was intended to *comfort* and *console* the oppressed and afflicted people of Judah" (Eiselen).

He is identified as "Nahum the Elkoshite." Some assume this refers to the name of his father (*Elkoshai*) and that he was actually born in Bethabor (which is beyond Jordan). The Chaldee Scriptures call him "Nahum of Beth-koshi." Most likely, though, this name refers to the place of his birth. The identification of this town is much disputed, however. There are four major theories:

A 16th century tradition identifies Elkosh with Al-Qush in Iraq, north of the site of Nineveh on the Tigris River. Nestorius (Patriarch of Constantinople --- 428-431 AD) mentioned an alleged "tomb of Nahum" at this site.

Jerome (340-420 AD), who produced the Latin Vulgate version of the Bible, believed it was in Galilee at a place called "Elkesi" near Ramah.

Most conservative scholars believe that Elkosh was a city in southern Judah (later called "Elcese") which was midway between Jerusalem and Gaza. "This would make Nahum a prophet of the southern kingdom and may explain his interest in the triumph of Judah --- Nahum 1:15; 2:2" (*The Open Bible* -- Expanded Version).

Many have speculated the city of "Capernaum" (Hebrew -- *Kepar-Nahum*), which means "village of Nahum," may have been the site of Elkosh, and that the city was renamed in honor of the prophet who came from there. Capernaum, however, was in Galilee, and some feel that John 7:52 refutes this view --- "Search, and see that no prophet arises out of Galilee."

Other views as to the location of this city are --- It was in Judah near Eleutheropolis, according to *Pseudo-Epiphanius*. Benjamin of Tudela (12th century AD) claimed to have seen Nahum's tomb south of Babylon. Ultimately, one must admit that the actual location of Elkosh is unknown, although it seems very likely, based on internal evidence from the book of Nahum itself, that this prophet was a resident of Judah.

Date

Scholars are able to date the prophecy of Nahum fairly accurately based upon three major considerations: In Nahum 3:8-10 the prophet speaks of the fall of the city of Thebes (*No-amon*) which was in upper Egypt. It is viewed as an event which had already occurred. Thebes fell to the Assyrians in 661 BC. Thus, this prophecy must have been written after this time.

Ten years after its fall, Thebes had begun to rise from its ruins, to rebuild, and to regain its former glory. If Nahum had waited too long after the fall of Thebes to use its destruction as a warning to Nineveh, the force of this warning would have been lost. Nineveh might well assume --- If Thebes can recover that quickly, then so can we!

The fall of Nineveh is viewed as a future occurrence. The city fell in 612 BC when the Medes and the Babylonians finally destroyed it. Thus, the prophecy must have been written prior to this event.

Nahum speaks of Nineveh as being "strong and full of her old imperial arrogance" (Blaiklock). This would place the prophecy in the time of Ashurbanipal (668-625 BC); it was under his successors that the nation declined and fell.

Nahum also mentions no king in his introduction. This has led some to the conclusion there was no king over God's people at that time worthy of mention --- this could well have been King Manasseh (686-642 BC).

All of these factors, and others which could be discussed as well, seem to point to a time around 655 BC. This would be just a little over four decades from the fall of this mighty nation.

Historical Background

The brutal imperialism of Assyria had been a curse to the lands of the Middle East for a couple of centuries. From the very beginning they had a policy of "westward conquest and world domination." They were noted as being one of the most aggressive, brutal, cruel and wicked nations on earth. "Assyria was a nation largely geared for aggressive war and its atrocities were proverbial. Nineveh saw men and nations as tools to be exploited to gratify the lust of conquest and commercialism. Assyria existed to render no service to mankind" (Willis).

Jonah prophesied to Nineveh about 758 BC. This resulted in national repentance. However, this change of heart was short-lived. Nineveh repented of its repentance! They were soon back on a course of world conquest and wicked aggression. Following is a list of her kings and conquests from the time of her "change of heart" until her destruction:

Tiglath-pileser III (745-727 BC) --- He began a program of world conquest. He invaded the West and deported some of the inhabitants of northern Israel, removing them to an area north of Nineveh. He also extended his authority into Judah, exacting tribute from them ...II Kings 15:29; 16:5-18; I Chron. 5:6, 26; II Chron. 28:16f; 30:6.

Shalmaneser V (727-722 BC) --- He began the siege of Samaria, the capital city of the northern kingdom of Israel. He died before the city fell.

Sargon II (722-705 BC) --- He completed the siege of Samaria. The city fell in 722 BC, thus bringing an end to the northern kingdom of Israel ...II Kings 17:3-6. He was murdered in 705 BC.

Sennacherib (705-681 BC) --- King Hezekiah (728-687 BC) abandoned his pro-Assyrian policy (II Kings 18:7, 19-20). As a result, Sennacherib invaded Judah (701 BC), conquered its fortified cities, and surrounded Jerusalem. He boasted that he had shut up Hezekiah in Jerusalem "as a bird in a cage!" However, the Angel of the Lord struck 185,000 of his soldiers dead in a single night, and the army withdrew ...II Kings 18:13 - 19:36; II Chron. 32:1-31; Isaiah 36:1 - 37:38. He was murdered by two of his sons (Adrammelech and Sharezer), and a third son (Esarhaddon) became king ...II Kings 19:37; Isaiah 37:38.

Esarhaddon (681-668 BC) --- It was this king who captured King Manasseh (686-642 BC) and led him away for a brief period of captivity (II Chron. 33:10-13). He died while marching against Egypt in an effort to subdue them.

Ashurbanipal (668-625 BC) --- This king completed the campaign into Egypt which resulted in the fall of "*No-amon*" 78

(Thebes) in 661 BC (Nahum 3:8-10). He extended Assyria's influence further than any of his predecessors. Under his rule, Nineveh became the mightiest city on earth. According to the records, he was an extremely cruel man.

The City --- The walls of Nineveh were almost 8 miles around. They were 100' high and wide enough that three chariots could ride on them side-by-side. Around the walls were towers that stretched an additional 100 feet above the top of the wall. In addition, there was a moat around the city 150' wide and 60' deep. Nineveh had enough provisions within the city to withstand a 20-year siege. Thus, Nahum's prophecy of the overthrow of this city seemed very unlikely indeed to the inhabitants. It was also a city filled with gardens and parks and even a zoo. The royal palace had an area of almost 100,000 square feet, and its walls were sculptured with scenes of the king's victories. There were 15 main gates with huge stone bulls standing guard at each.

Assur-etil-ilani and Sinshumlishir (625-620 BC) --- These two sons of Ashurbanipal had brief and ineffective reigns. The dynastic stability of Assyria was beginning to decline.

Sin-shar-ishkun (620-612 BC) --- This was the son of Assur-etil-ilani. He was also known as Esarhaddon II. During this time Nabopolassar (625-605 BC) established himself as the king of Babylon and began capturing Assyrian holdings. By 616 BC he had won complete independence from Assyria for Babylon. In 614 BC the Medes, under Cyaxares, captured the city of Ashur and inflicted a brutal massacre on the population. An alliance was then formed between the Medes and the Babylonians and the Scythians, and the siege of Nineveh began. The siege lasted 3 months, and it ended (according to the *Babylonian Chronicle*) when flood waters breached the walls allowing the soldiers to enter the city. This was according to the prophecy --- "With an overflowing flood He will make a complete end of its site" (Nahum 1:8). The Tigris River had overflowed its banks and eaten away at the walls. "As walls of those ancient cities were generally formed of brick kneaded with straw and baked in the sun, a flood of waters could easily effect their dissolution" (Adam Clarke). When the enemy entered the city, King Sin-shar-ishkun gathered his wives and children and all his wealth into the palace and set it on fire. They all perished in the fire.

A few of the Assyrians tried to hold out at Haran and reform the government, but they were defeated in 606 BC by King Nebuchadnezzar at the battle of Carchemish. The destruction of Nineveh was so complete that about 200 years later, when Xenophon the Athenian and "the Ten Thousand," backing out of their entanglement in Persia, passed by the site they said there was no evidence a city had ever been there!! Nahum 3:11, 17 predicted that they would be "hidden" and their place "not known." In more modern times, the site was not discovered until 1842. Today, the site is covered by fields, a water tower for a nearby village, a cemetery, and a local dump!

The Message of Nahum

The people of Nineveh had quickly reverted to their cruel and heathen practices. "They had not transmitted their knowledge of the true God to their children" (*Ryrie Study Bible*). They had repented of their repentance! Therefore, God, through Nahum, foretold the complete destruction of this kingdom. He had spared them once (during the time of Jonah). He would *not* do so again. Unlike Jonah, Nahum does not actually go to the city of Nineveh; rather he declares his oracle from afar. There is no hope of any repentance taking place, thus no need to go to the city.

Although this book is concerned with the downfall of Assyria, it is nevertheless written for the benefit of Judah. God has demonstrated His patience and long-suffering; now He will demonstrate His wrath! The message of this book is that although God may be slow to wrath, He nevertheless always "settles His accounts in full!" "Though God is slow to anger and abundant in loving-kindness (as His action toward

Nineveh in the book of Jonah shows), His long-suffering is not to be interpreted as indifference or as lack of power --- Nahum 1:1-6" (Willis).

This is also a message of consolation for the people of Judah who are being oppressed by Assyria. Regardless of how things may *seem*, God does not forget His people. The book of Revelation is a perfect example of this message. "When the forces opposing God are so firmly ensconced and the flickering lamp of God's people is at the point of extinction, however, it is easy for the remnant to forget. Nahum reminds us, as do the ruins of ancient Nineveh, that God Himself is the ultimate Ruler. HE WILL HAVE THE FINAL WORD!!" (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*).

"Some have objected to the joyous attitude with which Nahum greets the prospect of the fall of Assyria's capital, and regard it as an exhibition of nationalistic fanaticism and vengeful malice. This, however, is a misunderstanding of the ground which the prophet occupies. Because he is a man of God, he speaks as one who is wholly preoccupied with the Lord's cause on earth. His earnest desire is to see Jehovah vindicate His holiness in the eyes of the heathen, as over against the inhumane and ruthless tyranny of that God-defying empire which had for such a long time trampled upon all the subject nations with heartless brutality" (Gleason Archer).

J.M.P. Smith describes him as an "enthusiastic, optimistic patriot," but "his book is not the recording of personal glee over the fall of Nineveh, expressing the narrow hatred and prejudice of a single individual; but it is the fervent expression of the outraged conscience of mankind" (Homer Hailey). "It is one great '*At Last*'" (G.A. Smith).

"His cry is not only the cry of jubilation at the fall of an oppressive foe, but is also the cry of faith in the sovereign rule of Jehovah and a vindication of confidence that He will avenge His elect when the time is ripe. The lesson of his beautifully worded yet dreadful prophecy is one to which the world could well give heed today. The prophet reveals the eternal principle of the omnipotent God that for a nation to survive it must be established upon and directed by principles of righteousness and truth. Wickedness will eventually turn a nation back to Sheol, the oblivion of the unseen, when it makes cruelty and wickedness the standard by which it lives" (Homer Hailey).

NAHUM

Summarized Bible

Background of Nineveh

"An oracle concerning Nineveh. Because of their wickedness, God sent Jonah to preach to Nineveh saying, 'Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.'" They heard, repented, and were spared. Neither the time of Jonah's preaching nor the time of the repentant king of Nineveh's reign, are known. Some believe it was shortly before Isaiah.

Nineveh was the home of King Sennacherib, King of Assyria, during the reign of King Hezekiah and the lifetime of Judean prophet Isaiah.

In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and took them. (2 Kings 18:13)

Nahum Oracle

“The Lord is a jealous and avenging God; the Lord takes vengeance and is filled with wrath, but slow to anger and great in power. He will not leave the guilty unpunished. The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him.” (Nahum 1:2-3, 7)

“You, O Nineveh, will have no descendants to bear your name. I will destroy the carved images and cast idols that are in the temple of your gods. I will prepare your grave, for you are vile.” (Nahum 1:14)

“All who see you will flee from you and say, ‘Nineveh is in ruins, — who will mourn for her?’ Where can I find anyone to comfort you?” (Nahum 3:7)

“All your fortresses are like fig trees with their first ripe fruit; when they are shaken, the figs fall into the mouth of the eater. Look at your troops — they are all women! The gates of your land are wide open to your enemies.” (Nahum 3:12-13)

“Your shepherds slumber; your nobles lie down to rest. Your people are scattered on the mountains with no one to gather them. Nothing can heal your wound; your injury is fatal.” (Nahum 3:18-19)

“...Everyone who hears the news about you claps his hands at your fall and rejoice...” (Nahum 3:19)

Nineveh appears to have been destroyed over 100 years later. “In 612 BCE the city of Nineveh was sacked and burned by the allied forces of the Persians, Medes, Babylonians.”

Key Points from Nahum

- The Lord is an avenging God.
- The Lord is slow to anger but with great in power.
- He will not leave the guilty unpunished.
- He is a refuge in troublesome times, taking care of those who trust in Him.