
BOOK OF NAHUM

Approximate date: mid 600s B.C.E. (Right, conservative-moderate, some Left); 400s-200s B.C.E. (some Left)

Time period: the impending fall of Nineveh at the hands of Babylon

Author(s): Nahum (Right, some conservative-moderate); Nahum and/or anonymous other(s) (some conservative moderate); Nahum and anonymous redactors (Left)

Location of prophet/author(s): somewhere in Judah (Right, conservative-moderate, Left)

Target audience and their location: Southern Kingdom Israelites and Ninevites

People:

Nahum the Elkoshite

People mentioned:

Judah (people), Jacob and Israel (the second reference to people), king of Assyria

Places:

Nineveh

Places mentioned:

Bashan, Carmel, Lebanon, Thebes, Nile, Cush, Egypt, Put, Libya

Key Themes:

God states His intention to judge Nineveh / Judah will be freed from Nineveh's dominance / God decrees that an outsider will come and advance on Nineveh / God recounts how horrific the fall of Nineveh will be / Nineveh is compared to other cities that have fallen

Key Scriptures: Nahum 1:7-9, 12-13; 2:13 / **Nineveh's judge** (1:1-15); **Nineveh's judgment** (2:1-3:19)

Theological Summary: The Book of Nahum (Heb. *Nachum*, נַחֻם) is a text containing this prophet's vision (1:1), and primarily concerns the fall of Nineveh which occurred in 612 B.C.E. The name of the prophet means "comfort" (3:7). Nahum appears seventh among the Twelve Prophets of the Tanach, but is listed after the Book of Jonah in the Greek LXX.¹ We know little

¹ Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 926.

about Nahum himself, other than that he came from the (unknown) village of Elkosh (1:1), and there are various proposals offered as to where this place was located in antiquity.²

Nahum is a brief, yet difficult book to consider, as its principal focus is God's judgment upon Nineveh. It is a text rooted in Biblical history, as the author attests to the fall of the Egyptian city of Thebes or *No Amon* (3:8-10), something that occurred in 663 B.C.E. With Nahum prophesying the fall of Nineveh/Assyria, the period portrayed by the text thus falls somewhere between 663-612 B.C.E. Nahum was likely a contemporary of Zephaniah, Habakkuk, and Jeremiah.³

Often asserted by conservatives is that Nahum was actually a "writing prophet."⁴ It is suggested that Nahum was a writing prophet because of the eloquent composition of his prophecies, which are considered more eloquent than just oral accounts of a prophet written down. Conservatives widely accept that Nahum is predicting future events regarding the defeat of Nineveh, *not* reflecting back on events that have already happened. Some propose a composition of around 625 B.C.E., about ten years before the fall of Nineveh.⁵

Because of the detailed description of the fall of Nineveh, liberals often assert that the Book of Nahum was written very close to the event, possibly immediately after it. Some liberals adhere to a post-exilic composition of Nahum,⁶ and may simply argue that "Nineveh is viewed as paradigmatic of evil" (*EDB*).⁷ A common criticism of Nahum is that it only depicts a vengeful God with no mercy or compassion, and that the Prophet Nahum is a nationalistic, perhaps even false prophet, with no interest in anything but Israel.⁸ However, one cannot overlook the fact that in Nahum God is depicted as merciful (1:3; cf. Exodus 34:6) and that Nahum quotes Isaiah's promise of peace for His people (1:15; cf. Isaiah 52:7).

There are no significant differences between the DSS and LXX versions of Nahum. However, because of the unique poetry of Nahum, studies in Ugaritic and of Neo-Assyrian literature can aid in one's examination of the Hebrew of the text.⁹

The historical backdrop of Nahum can aid one significantly in examining the text as well. Assyria, represented by Nineveh, had already conquered the Northern Kingdom and posed a significant threat to the Southern Kingdom. The Assyrians were extremely brutal and ruthless,¹⁰ yet the judgment upon Nineveh had been temporarily averted per the work of Jonah (Jonah 3:4). However, following the death of Ashurbanipal the Babylonians began approaching upon Assyria,¹¹ by this time a waning power. The Prophet Nahum cheered the

² Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 926; Dillard and Longman, 404.

³ Alexander Fraser, "Nahum," in *NBCR*, 762.

⁴ Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 928; Carl E. Amerding, "Nahum," in *EXP*, 7:452; Dillard and Longman, 404.

⁵ Kevin J. Cathcart, "Nahum, Book of," in *ABD*, 4:999.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 4:999.

⁷ Richard Nysee, "Nahum, Book of," in *EDB*, 943; cf. John W. Rogerson, "Nahum," in *ECB*, 708.

⁸ Nysee, "Nahum, Book of," in *EDB*, 943.

⁹ Cathcart, "Nahum, Book of," in *ABD*, 4:998.

¹⁰ Amerding, in *EXP*, 7:449-451; Dillard and Longman, 405.

¹¹ Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 927.

fall of Nineveh as part of the Divine justice of God. Notable parallels exist between the Books of Nahum and Isaiah.¹²

Nahum includes words directed to both the Southern Kingdom Israelites (1:12-13) as the Temple is mentioned (1:15), but more are directed to the Ninevites (1:1, 14; 2:1, 13; 3:5-17, 19). The judgment oracles issued include vocabulary with varied moods present. The Book of Nahum depicts God as being “slow to anger” (1:3) and “a refuge in times of trouble” (1:7, NIV), but also One “who will by no means clear the guilty” (1:3, RSV). Difficult questions are often asked of the interpreter, as Nahum does depict a God who will judge the nations of the world. An underlying theme seen in Nahum is that while God will judge Nineveh for its sin, God will also judge Judah should it fall into a similar state. It is not impossible that Judah was in its own tenuous political and spiritual condition at the time of Nahum prophesying.¹³

The message of Nahum for us today is very clear: if we lose trust in God then we are in severe danger. God is against those who oppose Him (2:13; 3:5). The setting of Nahum’s prophecies regarded the defeat of Nineveh and the comfort of Judah.¹⁴ Appropriating this, “The Qumran community saw these theological issues and took comfort because they believed God would destroy their enemies” (*ISBE*).¹⁵ Both conservative and liberal interpreters should be united around the fact that “the book contains magnificent imagery as it contrasts the awesome majesty of God with the ultimate nothingness of some of the highest achievements of human civilization” (*ECB*).¹⁶

The tone of the Book of Nahum is harsh and it is very bloody, sadly keeping many Christians away from examining it.¹⁷ From a typological standpoint, though, Nahum helps us to understand Yeshua the Messiah as a warrior who will fight a future battle against Satan and his armies. At present, there is no significant Messianic engagement with the Book of Nahum.

Bibliography

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¹² Amerding, in *EXP*, 7:454-456.

¹³ R. Laird. Harris, “Nahum, Book of,” in *NIDB*, 689.

¹⁴ Fraser, in *NBCR*, 763.

¹⁵ G.V. Smith, “Nahum,” in *ISBE*, 3:479; cf. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 930.

¹⁶ Rogerson, in *ECB*, 708.

¹⁷ Dillard and Longman, pp 403, 408.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION ON NAHUM:

- 1. What do you think happened to Nineveh for its people to warrant such judgment by God, especially following the repentance that occurred during the ministry of Jonah?**
- 2. Do you believe that today's Messianic community takes the message and themes of Nahum seriously?**

REFLECTION ON NAHUM'S PLACEMENT IN THE CANON

Write two short paragraphs about what struck you about reading the Book of Nahum: