

Nahum

Introduction

As we will see, Obadiah was directed against a specific nation, Edom, likewise Nahum is directed against Assyria represented by her capital city. Thus, Nahum begins with the words "an oracle concerning Nineveh" (1:1).

As a major enemy of Israel, Nineveh is spoken of many times in the OT. But two books deal exclusively with Nineveh and each ends with a rhetorical question. These are Jonah and Nahum:

Should I not be concerned about that great city? (Jon.4:11).

Who has not felt your endless cruelty? (Nahum 3:19).

1A. Historical Background

The time frame of this book is especially important because "Nahum is deeply integrated into its historical milieu" (IOT 404).

Date of the book: Nahum must have been written after the fall of Thebes, the capital city of Egypt, in 664 B.C. and before the fall of Nineveh in 612 because 1) it speaks of the exile of Thebes as past (3:8-10) and 2) the fall of Nineveh as future (you are intact but I will prepare your grave, 1:12, 14).

Also, since Nahum refers to Nineveh as "unscathed and numerous" (1:12), since the Assyrian Empire was no longer intact after a serious civil war in 652 B.C. (between brothers for sole rule), the book was probably written before 652 (so between 664 and 652).

This is roughly the time of Manasseh through Josiah in the single Judaic Kingdom. Of course, the northern kingdom had already been taken in exile by the Assyrians (722 B.C.). This was a time of great evil followed by some positive national good promoted by Josiah.

2A. Literary Analysis

1B. Genre

It is a prophetic/war oracle booklet. Distinctively, Nahum calls his oracle a book (1:1). This contrasts with most of the prophets who were preachers, and their contributions to the OT were "later collections of their oral utterances" (IOT 406).

2B. Contents

Introduction, 1:1

Hymn to God, 1:2-2:2

God cares for those who trust in him and He pursues his foes, especially, Nineveh into darkness.

The destruction of Nineveh, 2:3-3:19

The prophet sees the future as present and taunts Nineveh as a lion who had young ones for whom she took prey; her young lions will be devoured. Nineveh is a harlot whose shame will be exposed (3:5). Her fortresses are like fig trees when shaken, whose fruit falls into the mouth of the eater (3:12).

3A. Message

The message is partly summarized in 1:7-8. It gives hope to the afflicted Judean people of God to know that their enemy who took the north captive is God's enemy and the day of punishment is at hand (God is righteous and will not leave the guilty unpunished).

Time and process show that God is slow to anger (1:3) but his wrath will be poured out one day like fire; he will make an end of Nineveh.

This action against the enemies of God's people tokens the fact that "The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him" (1:7).

Thus the perplexities in the history of the nations in relation to the covenant people are not due to the unfaithfulness of God but to sin. The milestone of God's intervention in judgment may grind slowly but it grinds exceedingly fine.

4A. Theme

The theme is the good news to Judah that Nineveh will be pursued into darkness because the Lord cares for those who trust in him, and He will restore the splendor of Jacob (1:8, 15; 2:2).

Key to the message is the restoration theme: The Lord will restore the splendor of Jacob.

Restoration of the ruined vines looks to resettlement and peace in the land which unfolds in the prophetic literature into the restoration of Eden because Israel's enemies are God's enemies.

We are brought again to the accomplishment of God's purposes through history that will end with rest in the land of the final Eden.

5A. Message for us

From the NT we know this will be accomplished through Jesus as the divine warrior who fights for his people against all opposition that led to the ruin of Eden. This includes Satanic opposition.

Satan is like a lion with many prey and many messengers of whom it will be said, "The voices of your messengers will no longer be heard" (2:13; Rev. 19:11-20:3).

The strong man is plundered when bound; Jesus is plundering Satan's domain by saving grace (Matt. 12:29, Or how can someone enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house).

We are more than conquerors through him (Rom. 8:28-30). Beautiful feet now carry the good news to the ends of the earth (Nahum 1:15; Isa. 52:7; Rom. 10:15).

Behold, upon the mountains, the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace! Keep your feasts, O Judah; fulfill your vows, for never again shall the worthless pass through you; he is utterly cut off (Nah 1.15).

And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" ¹⁶ But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" (Rom 10.15-16)

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns." (Isa 52.7)