

God's Twelve Voices that Shaped His People: Nahum

Adult Bible Class

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Introduction

How can we grasp the “living messages of the OT prophets”? What did the text say? What did the text mean? What does the text say today? What does the text mean today? That is, what are the applications.

Backgrounds of the text, social setting, and prophet provides parallels in our day.
Nahum can be described as Jonah—Part 2.

Points of interest

Nahum is from Elkosh. We are not certain of this town's location and so we are also uncertain of where Nahum conducted his ministry. The plausible locations of Elkosh, given the availability of evidence, are (1) Assyria (in which case Nahum is among the Jewish exiles from the now destroyed Northern Kingdom), (2) the area of the former Northern Kingdom (now controlled by Assyria), or (3) Judah. No good evidence exists for any of the identifications.

The name Nahum means “comfort” or “compassion”, thus providing an interesting background or contrast to the message delivered.

There is no call, vision, or prophetic experience recounted.

Historical setting

The date is in some dispute, but is most likely late 7th century B.C. (650-612 B.C.). The allusion to the capture of Thebes (3:8) prevents an earlier date, and it is unlikely that Nahum would have written after the fall of Nineveh in 612 B.C.

This date makes Nahum a contemporary of Jeremiah.

Textual considerations

The theme of Nahum is Nineveh's fall.

It may have been written to comfort God's people (in parallel to the concept in Obadiah as Israel is comforted by the message of destruction and judgment for Edom).

The book says nothing about the sins of God's people.

The book has only three chapters and is easily divided into two sections. The first section (chapter 1) is a theophany, a vision of God coming in judgment. The second section describes the downfall of Nineveh despite its frenzied defense. The book concludes with an epitaph to Nineveh (3:18f).

The book describes itself as a “burden”, technically an “oracle against” (cf. NT “woe”).

Contemporary lessons

- Vengeance belongs to the Lord. He repays in his good time, according to his mercy and grace.

- Though God is slow to anger and abundant in loving kindness (compare the book of Jonah), his long-suffering is not indifference or lack of power (Nahum 1:1-6; cf. 2 Pet. 3:1-9).
- God is a God of wrath and indignation against sin.
- God is a stronghold in times of trouble for those who trust him (1:7).
- God rules in the kingdoms and affairs of mankind.
- No human stronghold is secure against God's power.
- God is not forever patient.

Questions

What does Nahum's description of God's providence say in light of today's international problems and conflicts?

Is Nahum too joyful over Nineveh's fall?

What does one learn about God in the book of Nahum?

Can a person love good without hating injustice and evil?

What do you make of the idea that Nahum is an unfulfilled prophecy, so that current events are to be interpreted as the fulfillment of God's will as reflected in Old Testament prophecies?

What does it mean for a person, church, or nation to put their trust in God?