

OUTLINE OF NAHUM

I. The coming of the Lord in judgement . . . 1:2—1:15

II. Details of Niniveh's downfall . . . 2:1—3:17

Epitaph of Niniveh . . . 3:18-19

CHAPTER XI

PREFACE

NAHUM, THE PROPHET

Little is known about the prophet, Nahum. His name means *comforter*. He was contemporary with Habakkuk, Zephaniah and Jeremiah. The opening verse of the book which bears his name identifies him as a native of Elkoshite. Unfortunately, modern archeology has thus far been unable to locate Elkoshite. However, strong Jewish tradition places it at Alkosh about thirty miles north of Mosul.

The Galilean city of Capernaum, center of activity during the Roman period and headquarters of Jesus' ministry, has been suggested as Nahum's home. Capernaum means, literally, "village of Nahum." However, there is no proof it is so-called for the prophet Nahum rather than some other with the same name.

The date of Nahum's prophecy is not too difficult to estimate. The capture of Niniveh by Babylon, which Nahum vividly predicts, took place c. 612 B.C. In *Nahum* 3:8-10 is the description of the fall of Karnak, or Thebes, (No-Amon) as a *fait accompli*. Karnak fell in 633 B.C. Nahum's prophecy, then, must have been written between 633 and 612 B.C.

To be a bit more exact, Nahum probably prophesied between the beginning of Josiah's reform, c. 621, and the fall of Nineveh, c. 612. An educated guess places the date at about 614 B.C. Some have dated this work as early as 650 B.C., but this seems unlikely in view of recent information concerning the date of Ashurbanipal's capture of Karnak, as well as the even more recent discovery of a portion of the annals of Nabopolassar, King of Persia at the time Nineveh fell.

According to these annals, Nabopolassar, formerly a vassal of Assyria, and Cyaxares, king of the Medes, were in an allied warfare against Assyria as early as 616 B.C. These allies brought Nineveh

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down in 612 B.C. Egypt was involved in this struggle on the side of Assyria. Following the fall of Nineveh, the Assyrian capital was moved to Haran, which subsequently fell to the Medo-Persian alliance in 610.

From other sources we learn that the war ended in the final defeat of Pharaoh Necho and the remnant of the Assyrian army in the battle of Carchemish by Nebuchadnezzar.

HISTORIC SITUATION

With this secular record of history at hand, and in light of *I Kings 23:29* and *II Chronicles 35:20-24*, we arrive at the following historic situation as prevailing in Nahum's time. By 616 B.C. the Medes and Babylonians on the one hand and the Assyrian-Egyptian alliance on the other had divided the mid-eastern world into two power blocks. The struggle was for the absolute rule of the entire area.

In Judah there were two parties. With the little kingdom caught in the squeeze between the super powers, one party favored the rise of Babylon, hoping thereby to see the demise of Assyria and the guarantee of Judean independence. This party was led by king Josiah and his court.

The other party preached that a pro-Babylonian stance by Judah would only lead to a Babylonian takeover of Judah once the major power struggle was settled. This latter seems to be the position of Jeremiah (cf *Jeremiah 13:21*), while Nahum, an avowed Assyrophobe, favored an alliance with Babylon lest Judah suffer the same fate as Israel at the hands of Assyria.

This apparent difference of political views on the part of Nahum and Jeremiah does not prevent their agreement concerning the judgments of God against Godless nations.

Nahum is not quoted in the New Testament, but it was included in the specific body of writings which Jesus and the New Testament writers called "Scriptures," or "the oracles of God." It deals exclusively with the downfall of Nineveh and makes no Messianic predictions. Recent archeology has vindicated Nahum's description of Nineveh's downfall.

THE NATURE OF NAHUM

It is to be remembered that Nahum's prophecy, in the original, was in the form of an incomplete poetic accrostic. As such, it does not easily lend itself to exegetical commentary. To so dissect any poem is to lose much of its esthetic value and, in the case of prophecy, some of its overall impact.

The theme of Nahum is revenge. History has born testimony to the accuracy of the preview of destruction, but there is little to explain Nahum's attitude. Rejoicing at the bloody destruction of a people who had no opportunity to know God seems out of harmony with God's loving concern for all men.

Perhaps we need to separate the facts of the prophecy from the attitude of the prophet. As in the case of Jonah, God may have not been pleased with Nahum's revelling in Nineveh's destruction.

We cannot but recall Jonah's prejudiced refusal to preach to Nineveh at the outset, and his petulant pouting under a gourd vine when it became evident, upon Nineveh's repentance, that God would rather forgive than destroy. (Cp. *Jonah, chapter four*)

Nahum's prophecy will be appreciated more if two things are kept in mind: (1) the poetic nature of the book and (2) its sequel relationship to Jonah which precedes it by something more than a century.

NINEVEH

Nineveh, as capital of Assyria, was the leader of an empire whose chief aim was aggressive warfare against her neighbors. Asshur, some fifty miles south of Nineveh, had been the original Assyrian capital, but about the time of Sennacherib, (c. 710 B.C.), and for roughly a century thereafter, Nineveh gained the ascendancy and served as capital.

It was about the time Nineveh became capital of Assyria that Jonah was sent to preach repentance to the city. Then Nineveh heeded Jonah's warning but their repentance was apparently short-lived.

Sennacherib built Nineveh's fortifications, aggrandized her temples and installed a remarkably sophisticated water system. It is estimated that as many as 10,000 slaves worked for twelve years just to build the 15,000,000 ton earthen platform upon which the royal palace was set. Exiles from Israel may have formed part of that work force. (Cp. *II Kings 18:13-16*)

Diodorus describes a defensive wall about Nineveh forming a sixty mile circumference. This inner defense wall, whose twin may be viewed today among the remains of Nineveh, formed a 7½ mile circuit broken by fifteen gates.

The present ruins of Nineveh seem to be somewhat farther (some 1500 yards) from the Tigris River than was the city in Nahum's day. A growing Arab village is today slowly covering the site of the ancient city.

The city and the empire she ruled were as cruel as her founder, Nimrod (cf. *Genesis 10:11*). Her kings, in their official records, made

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no attempt, as do modern despots, to hide the fact of their fierce atrocities.

However, Nineveh's ability to rule the world did not match her ability to conquer it. No effective administration governed Assyria's conquered territories. Rather, defeated enemies were considered simply the means of gratifying Nineveh's drive for conquest and the spoils of war. Mankind has inherited no positive legacy from the Assyrian empire.

Israel became a vassal of Assyria c. 854 B.C. and was finally destroyed by her in 722 B.C.

Under Ahaz, Judah became vassal to Assyria c. 735 B.C. Jerusalem was threatened by the armies of Assyria under Sargon c. 711 B.C. (cf. *Isaiah* 20) and Judah was severely punished by her c. 701 B.C. The complete submission of Judah to Nineveh was thwarted by the remarkable destruction of Sennacherib's army. (Cf. *II Kings* 18:13—19:36)

After the city of Nineveh was destroyed by the Medo-Persian alliance in 612 B.C., the Assyrian capital moved to Haran where it stayed until destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in 605 B.C. at the battle of Carchemish.

Nineveh reached its peak, as did the Assyrian empire of which it was capital, under the reign of Ashurbanipal. When he died c. 626 B.C., the downfall began. There are no Assyrian records of the last twenty-five years of her own existence. The final obliteration of Nineveh was total! Two hundred years later the Greek army passed by the site and gave no indication of knowing it had ever existed!

Chapter XI—Questions

Preface

1. The name Nahum means _____.
2. The name Capernaum means _____.
3. Was Capernaum the home of the prophet Nahum?
4. List and discuss the date of Nahum.
5. Nineveh was brought down in 612 B.C. by an alliance of _____.
6. The war in which Nineveh was destroyed ended with the defeat of Pharaoh Necho at _____ by _____.
7. By 616 B.C. the _____ and _____ on the one hand and _____ and _____ on the other hand had divided the middle east into two power blocks.
8. In Judah at this time were two parties, one favored the rise of _____ while the other was afraid of this.