

Introduction to Nahum

Where is it in the Bible?

Nahum is the thirty-fourth book in the Christian Old Testament and is found between Micah and Habakkuk. It is the seventh book of the Minor Prophets; the term “minor” refers to the length of the books, not to their importance. In the Hebrew Bible, the minor prophets follow Ezekiel at the end of the Prophets section and are grouped together in the Book of the Twelve in the same order as found in Christian Bibles

Who wrote it?

The first verse of the book identifies the author as “Nahum of Elkosh”. Nahum is not mentioned elsewhere in the Bible, and the location of Elkosh is unknown.

When was it written?

The book mentions the Assyrian destruction of Thebes in 663 B.C. (3:8-10), so it must have been written after that. Nineveh itself was destroyed in 612, and the general assumption is that the book was written around that time, although it might have been earlier.

What is it about?

The book of Nahum announces the Lord’s coming judgment of Assyria and its capital Nineveh with vivid images. The oracles are directed only at Assyria, and, in contrast to other prophetic books, there is no indictment of Judah. Martin Luther expressed the theme of the book in this way: “The book teaches us to trust God and to believe, especially when we despair of all human help, human powers, and counsel, that the Lord stands by those who are his shields his own against all attacks of the enemy, be they ever so powerful.”¹

How is it structured?

- I. Superscription (1:1)
- II. Psalm Portraying God’s Power and Wrath (1:2-8)
- III. Deliverance for God’s People (1:9-15)
- IV. Oracles Against Nineveh (2:1-3:19)

What are some things to look for?

- **Vengeance:** The vengeful tone of the book is disturbing to modern readers. In this context, the difference between Judah and Assyria as far as God’s judgment is concerned “is whether or not one takes refuge in God or persists as an enemy of God.”² The book of Jonah offers a contrasting attitude toward Nineveh. The two books together show that “God is both just (Nahum) and merciful (Jonah) toward oppressors and oppressed alike.”³

1 Quoted in Duane L. Christensen, “Nahum” in *Harper Collins Bible Dictionary*, ed. Paul Achtmeier (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 732.

2 Richard W. Nysse at <http://www.enterthebible.org/oldtestament.aspx?rid=52>

3 Gwen Sayler, “Nahum” in *Lutheran Study Bible* (Minneapolis: AugsburgFortress, 2009) 1516.