

The Prophets

Lesson #33

Introduction To Nahum

I. **Structure Of Nahum**

- A. The book opens with a brief identification of the prophet Nahum. Then it launches into a psalm of praise that celebrates the power and goodness of God. This comforting picture is contrasted with the evil deeds of the Assyrians. With graphic language, Nahum presents a prophetic picture of the coming judgment of God. He informs the nation of Assyria that its days as a world power are drawing to a close. In an oracle of woe, the prophet describes Nineveh as a "bloody city, completely full of lies and pillage" (3:1). Soon the city of Nineveh will be laid waste, and Assyria will crumble before the judgment of God.
- B. Nahum's book is considered one of the most poetic in the Old Testament, and has therefore been given the title, "the prophet of poetry." It has been described as "stately and impressive." As one reads it he feels himself carried from thought to thought at a rapid and highly excited pace. The style is forceful, brilliant and lifelike. One feels that he is sharing with the prophet the excitement of the moment.
- C. Although the book is considered very poetic, the burden of Nahum's message is a certain fiery form of indignation, almost akin to animosity and revenge, and expressive of the pent-up feelings of generations of suffering people which bursts forth like a flame of fire upon Israel's national foe. It is outraged humanity at large which calls for vengeance.

II. **Authorship And Date**

- A. This book was written by a prophet known as "Nahum the Elkoshite" (1:1). The name "Nahum" means "Consolation." This brief identification tells us all we know about this spokesman for the Lord. Even the location of his home, Elkosh, is uncertain. The name Capernaum in the Hebrew language means "the village of Nahum" which has caused many to believe Elkosh was in Galilee. However, most scholars believe he may have lived in northern Judah. At times Nahum apparently speaks as a representative of Judah; and, as an enthusiastic patriot, betrays his local surroundings (1:4, 15: 2:1; 3:1-7).
- B. The book can be dated with reasonable accuracy. The earliest date identifiable in the book is the fall of No-amon, the Egyptian Thebes (3:8). The expedition alluded to was carried out by Ashurbanipal, king of Assyria, in 663 B.C. Nineveh fell, as Nahum predicted, about 612 B.C. Therefore, the book was written between these two dates, although most scholars narrow the date to the time between 630 and 612 B.C.

III. **Historical Setting**

- A. For more than 100 years before Nahum's day, Assyria had been one of the dominant powers of the ancient world. The northern kingdom of Israel fell to Assyrian forces in 722 B.C. Some prophets taught that this pagan nation was used as an instrument of God's judgment against His wayward people (Isaiah 10:5-11), but now it was Assyria's turn to feel the force of God's wrath. Ashurbanipal, the king who led Assyrian armies in victory over No-amon, was exceptionally cruel. He even boasted of his violence and shameful atrocities. It is reported that he tore off the lips and limbs of kings, forced three captured rulers of Elam to drag his chariot through the streets, compelled a prince to wear around his neck the decapitated head of his king and feasted in a garden with the head of a Chaldean monarch whom he had forced to commit suicide hanging from a tree above them. No other king of Assyria ever boasts of such inhuman and atrocious actions.
- B. The armies of Nabopolassar of Babylon stormed Nineveh in 612 B.C. and destroyed it thoroughly. The entire Assyrian Empire crumbled three years later under the relentless assault of this aggressive Babylonian ruler. Thus, as Nahum prophesied, Assyria's day of dominance ended with their humiliation by a foreign power.

IV. **Scriptural Contribution**

- A. This book teaches the sure judgment of God against those who oppose His will and abuse His people. Acts of inhumanity are acts against God, and He will serve as the ultimate and final judge. God sometimes uses a pagan nation as an instrument of His judgment, just as He used the Assyrians against the nation of Israel.
- B. When God does use a nation in this fashion, it does not excuse the pagan nation from God's laws and requirements. It will be judged by the same standards of righteousness and holiness which God applies to all the other people of the world. Nahum's prophecy is not the recording of personal glee over the fall of a national foe, but it is the fervent expression of the outraged conscience of mankind. It is not Israel's pride that is at stake but God's honor and faithfulness that He will avenge His people when the time is ripe.

V. **Special Considerations**

- A. Some people wonder about the gloomy, pessimistic tone of the book of Nahum. How can this picture of God's wrath and judgment be reconciled with the God of grace and love whom we meet in the New Testament? As the sovereign, all-powerful God, He has the right to work His purpose in the world. Judgment against sin is a part of the work which He must do in order to remain a just and holy God.

B. Nahum's announcement of God's approaching judgment also carries a call for holy living and faithful proclamation by God's people. Our work is to carry the message of His salvation to those who are surely doomed unless they turn to God in repentance and faith.