

Nahum (December 16)

Reading Nahum

Oxen lean into their yoke, slowly drawing a two-wheeled cart between the houses. The cart rattles under its burden as the rude wooden wheels roll over rocks and shards and soft patches in the street. Suddenly, hooves and eight-spoke wheels clatter behind the oxen. Chariots roll up the hill, as rein-lashing drivers and warriors shout for space on the streets. Their warhorses snort and toss their manes, closing rapidly on the oxen. The ox-driver goads his animals to move them aside and let the chariots race past so they can rush toward the battle lines.

The Lord promised Nahum that the yoke burdening Judah – the conquering Assyrian army – would soon be removed. Though the Assyrians had perfected the strategic use of their chariots, they would not overcome the Babylonians' attacks. The wood, leather, and wicker of the Assyrian chariots would race to their own destruction in the fires of war. Nineveh, Assyria's proud capital, would fall as the Lord of hosts declared.

Author and Date

The book contains the vision of Nahum, whose name means "comfort" and is related to the name Nehemiah. Nothing is known about him except his hometown (Elkosh), and even its general location is uncertain.

In Nahum 3:8-10 the author speaks of the fall of Thebes, which happened in 663 BC, as already past. In all three chapters Nahum prophesies Nineveh's fall, which was fulfilled in 612. Nahum therefore uttered this oracle between 663 and 612, perhaps near the end of this period since he represents the fall of Nineveh as imminent. This would place him during the reign of Josiah and make him a contemporary of Zephaniah and the young Jeremiah.

Recipients

Some words are addressed to Judah, but most are addressed to Nineveh. The book, however, was meant for Judahite readers.

Literary Style

The contents are primarily judicial (judgment oracles), with appropriate descriptions and vocabulary, as well as intense moods, sights, and sounds. The language is poetic, with frequent use of metaphors and similes, vivid word pictures, repetitions, and many short phrases. Rhetorical questions punctuate the flow of thought, which has a marked stress on moral indignation toward injustice.

Theological Themes

The focal point of the entire book is the Lord's judgment on Nineveh for her oppression, cruelty, idolatry, and wickedness. The book ends with the destruction of the city. God's righteous and just kingdom will ultimately triumph, for kingdoms built on wickedness and tyranny must eventually fall, as Assyria did. In addition, Nahum declares the universal sovereignty of God. God is Lord of history and of all nations; as such he controls their destinies.

Blessings for Readers

As you read this short prophecy, take note of how the Lord cares for his wayward people, calling them back to faithfulness and promising them aid. The Lord has good news for you too! Cling to the promises of his word and his feasts, which pointed forward to the revelation of the Prince of Peace, Jesus.