

The Minor Prophets

NAHUM

- I. Central Message: The destruction of Ninevah
- II. Introduction
 - A. About Ninevah
 1. capital city of Assyria (the nation that took Israel into captivity - II Kings 17)
 2. first mentioned in Genesis 10:11
 3. Jonah had prophesied to this city and they repented
 4. their destruction came in 612 B.C. at the hands of the Babylonians and others
 - a. one of their legends said that the city could not be destroyed until the river became its enemy
 - b. prior to their destruction, a nearby river, swollen by rains and with a rapid current, carried away a portion of the city walls, thus enabling attackers to enter
 - c. the king, concluding that this was a fulfillment of the legend, gathered his servants and climbed atop a tower which was set on fire, thus perishing in the flames
 - d. the destructive flood is perhaps referred to in 1:8 and 2:6 while the fire is perhaps described in 3:13,15
 - B. About Nahum
 1. name means "consolation"
 2. contemporary of Habakkuk, Zephaniah and maybe Jeremiah
 3. preached during the reigns of Amon and then Josiah in Judah
 - C. About the book
 1. probably written between 625 B.C. and the time of Ninevah's destruction (612)
 2. 1:2 sets the tone for the rest of the book
 3. Nahum has nothing to say about the sins of Judah nor does he introduce any concepts about God; his whole thrust has to do with the destruction of Ninevah
 4. Ninevah was guilty of many sins including ruthless government, idolatry and inequities in business
 5. "Great Ideas of Nahum" (from The Minor Prophets by Jack Lewis, p. 59)
 - a. "God rules in the kingdoms of men"
 - b. "God is a stronghold in the time of trouble." (Nahum 1:7)
 - c. "There are no strongholds secure from the vengeance of God."
 - d. "'The history of the world is the judgment of the world,' said Schiller. Nations mete out judgment to nations. Nations reap what they sow and the wages of sin is death. Nahum is a book of relevance in a world of dictators."
 - e. "The end of God's patience."

III. First Section (Nahum 1)

A. 1:1

1. "burden" = "a thing lifted up, pronounced or proclaimed"
2. this message of Nahum is a weighty matter for those who served as God's tools of punishment against Israel "(As the Assyrians under Pul, Tiglath-Pileser, and Shalmaneser, three of their kings, had been employed by a just God for the chastisement of His disobedient people; the end now being accomplished by them, God is about to burn the rod wherein he corrected Israel; and Ninevah, the capital of the Assyrian empire, is to be destroyed." - Adam Clarke's Commentary, Vol. IV, p. 733)

B. 1:2-15

1. this section constitutes a poem whose theme is "the certainty and severity of God's vengeance upon the heathen" (The New Bible Commentary, p. 729)
2. verse 2
 - a. God is jealous
 - i. He wants people to worship Him and no one else and is angered when worship is directed to false gods
 - ii. Exodus 20:1-6
 - b. the Lord takes vengeance
 - i. Romans 12:19 - "Vengeance is mine; I will repay; saith the Lord."
 - ii. Numbers 32:23 - "Be sure your sin will find you out."
 - c. He is furious (who can stand before the anger of God?)
 - d. the closing part of the verse indicates that God does not forget sins which are unrepented of (this verse clearly denies the doctrine of universalism which says that God's grace will save all men, regardless of how they lived)
3. verse 3
 - a. the Lord is slow to anger
 - i. II Peter 3:9
 - ii. tie this in with verse two
 - A. God is slow to anger
 - B. but God is furious with Ninevah
 - C. how great were the sins of Ninevah that produced such hot anger in God!
 - b. He'll not count the wicked as innocent but will wreak vengeance on them
 - i. the reason Ninevah had not yet been destroyed was because of God's slowness to anger
 - ii. but His patience can be exhausted and then the guilty would not go free
 - c. "A passage such as this is a reminder that God's anger is directed against all unrighteousness and that, without repentance, there is no cheap and easy forgiveness." (The New Bible Commentary, p. 729)
4. the end of verse 3 through verse 6 demonstrates the power of God
 - a. metaphorically, He rides upon His chariot and kicks up the clouds like an earthly chariot disturbs dust
 - b. He has dried up the rivers and seas
 - c. in His presence the earth trembles

- d. who can stand before this?
 - i. who can escape His wrath?
 - ii. the Ninevites would be fools to think that they could avoid the wrath of God or somehow escape His punishment
- 5. verse 7
 - a. this word of comfort is not so much for Ninevah as it is for Judah
 - b. the oppressors would be destroyed so the faithful could take comfort
- 6. verse 8
 - a. "but" is a key word which shows a contrast in thought and condition
 - b. God will protect the faithful BUT He will roll like floodwaters over the disobedient
- 7. verse 9 - God is able to wreak His punishment all at one time
- 8. verse 10 - the unity of the Ninevites (perhaps their boldness through drink as well) will not save them
- 9. verse 11 - wicked counselors abounded in Assyria (see II Kings 18:13-37 and II Kings 19:23)
- 10. verses 12-13 - the promise to God's people that His punishment against them would cease
- 11. verse 15
 - a. how welcome is the messenger who brings words of comfort in times of trouble
 - b. Judah still expected to be obedient

IV. Second Section (Nahum 2)

A. Verses 1-6

- 1. describes the siege of Ninevah at the hands of the Babylonians and Medes
- 2. verse 1
 - a. the first phrase is a description of the attackers as God is using them for punitive purposes
 - b. the latter part of the verse is perhaps a mockery; Nahum challenges Ninevah to try to get themselves ready (though he himself knows it is useless)
- 3. verses 3-4
 - a. a description of the battle
 - b. the colors red and scarlet were favored by the fighting men of Assyria (Clarke wrote, "they had red shields and scarlet or purple clothing; their chariots were finely decorated and proceeded with amazing rapidity" - Clarke's Commentary, Vol. IV, p. 735)
- 4. verse 5 - the best men would be gathered for the battle and would make haste to it
- 5. verse 6 - perhaps has reference to the enemy opening floodgates and allowing the river to destroy

B. Verses 7-10

- 1. a description of the ransacking by the attackers
- 2. Huzzab was perhaps the queen or even the city itself
- 3. verse 8 - none would stay to defend but would hasten to save their lives
- 4. verse 9 - the items taken by the attackers

5. verse 10
 - a. the sight of Ninevah at this stage is heartbreaking to its former residents
 - b. "She is empty, and void, and waste" ("The original is strongly emphatic: the words are of the same sound and increase in their length as they point out great, greater and greater desolation." - Clarke's Commentary, Vol. IV, p. 736)
- C. Verses 11-13
1. the lion was the national symbol of Assyria
 2. verse 11
 - a. where are the strong men and mighty leaders who once walked in Ninevah?
 - b. none can be found for they have all run or been killed
 3. verse 12
 - a. a description of how Ninevah acquired its wealth
 - b. "whelps" = the rich and "noble" of the city
 - c. even though great detail is not given concerning their evil plunderings, we can see the ruthlessness of the Ninevites in terms such as "tear in pieces" and "strangled"
 - d. "filled...his dens with ravin" (NKJV reads, "filled...his dens with flesh")
 4. vs. 13 - the worst thing we could ever hear would be God saying to us, "I am against you"
- V. Third Section (Nahum 3)
- A. Verses 1-7
1. they had been liars and cheats, always on the lookout for a prey
 2. verses 2-3 give a graphic description of the battle
 3. verses 4-7 use the metaphor of a harlot
 - a. this is often used in the Old Testament when speaking of the sin of idolatry (Leviticus 17:7; 20:6; Ezekiel 23:30)
 - b. Ninevah had done whatever it would take to become a wealthy city, including cheating and turning to idols when this worked to their advantage
 - c. because of this, the city would lose its beauty and become vile and a disgusting sight with no mourners or comforters around
 - d. certain ancient customs called for harlots to be stripped of their clothes and exposed publicly ("I will discover thy skirts upon thy face") and then be set in place for the public to come by and stare at them and even throw mud at them (verse 6)
- B. Verses 8-15
1. No was No-Amon (Thebes) in Egypt
 - a. it had rivers and the Mediterranean Sea as its natural defenses plus the human aid of various armies (verse 9), yet it was overthrown
 - b. Ninevah ought not to think itself invincible for it was not as well defended as No
 2. verse 11 - Ninevah would reel as a drunken man and seek the aid of other armies
 3. verse 12 - their strong places would fall with as much ease as figs fall to the ground when they are ripe

4. verse 13 - there is no courage left in the city and every bit of it shall be destroyed
 5. verse 14 - Nahum is mockingly telling them to get ready, even though he himself realizes it is too late to prepare their defenses
 6. verse 15 - even though they might gather themselves like the locusts, it is in the manner of locusts that they shall be destroyed (see Joel for a description of the destructiveness of locusts; here it is used to describe the great destruction that the enemy shall wreak against Ninevah)
- C. Verses 16-19
1. the imagery of the locusts is continued, this time having reference to the locusts flying away and being scattered (this is what the Ninevites, even their leaders, would do)
 2. verse 18 - the leadership ran, thus leaving the people to wander aimlessly and helplessly
 3. verse 19
 - a. the city would not be rebuilt
 - b. "bruit" = "news"
 - c. when the other nations who Assyria had abused (and these were many), received the news of its overthrow, they would rejoice

VI. Perhaps the saddest thought prompted by the book of Nahum is that Ninevah had had its chance to repent. It did repent under Jonah's preaching but went back to its evil ways. God forgives the penitent, but He expects continued obedience to His will all the days of one's life.