

1. Date of Nahum's prophecy.

Nahum's name probably means 'comforted by Yahweh'. His life is not easy to re-construct. The location of his hometown of Elkosh [Na 1.1] has not been conclusively identified, although Galilee is most likely. The only dates we can be sure of are the two events that he mentions, so we can date his prophecy between these two events:

[a] the fall of the Egyptian city of Thebes [called No-amon in the text] in 663 BC to the Assyrian armies of Ashurbanipal [Na 3.8-10].

[b] the destruction of Nineveh in 612 BC [Na1.1;2.8;3.7]. This fall seems so immanent when we read the text that it may be right to date the prophecy shortly before the collapse of the Assyrian capital; perhaps around 615 BC when the coalition of Babylonians, Medes and Scythians was formed that eventually brought the city down.

The date of Nahum's prophecy

How Nineveh fell.

2. The circumstances of the Fall of Nineveh.

There is a Babylonian Chronicle of the fall of Nineveh. It is a concise record of the campaigns of their king, Nabopolassar, from 616-609 BC. This chronicle shows that Nabopolassar, unable to gain a clear victory over the Assyrians joined forces with Cyaxares, the king of the Medes. Aided by the flooding river [Na 2.6], they laid siege to Nineveh for two months.

Once the city fell, despite an alliance between the Assyrian forces and Egypt, the Assyrian empire came to a halt by 609 BC.

Outline of the book

3. Outline of the Book:

Na1.1 The "burden" [oracle] about Nineveh.

The Hebrew word 'massa' means a burden, but can also mean a thing lifted up, pronounced or proclaimed. So it is translated 'oracle' [REB 1989]. It was used by prophets to signify a revelation that they had received from the Lord to deliver to a particular audience.

Na1.2-8 - The vengeance of the Lord upon his enemies

Nahum opens the prophecy against the Assyrians and their metropolis with a description of the Lord's character; his wonderful justice, tender compassion and mighty power.

Na1.9-11 - Sudden overthrow of Nineveh

With very lively pictorial language, of which Nahum is a master craftsman, he outlines the sudden demise of Nineveh. Arising out of Nineveh were Assyrian oppressors, evil counsellors, such as Pul [2K17.6] and Sennacherib [2K18.17;19.23] and the Rabshekah. Sennacherib invaded Judea with an army of 200,000 men.

Na1.12-14 - The Lord proclaims the overthrow of Assyria and the deliverance from the Assyrian yoke for his people. This refers to the tribute that the Jews were obliged to pay to the Assyrians [2K17.14]. The idols of Assyria will be destroyed.

Na1.15-2.2 - Welcome the messenger [Is52.7] who will bring glad tidings.

They should keep on with their feasts and pay their vows to the Lord. he will keep them from being overrun. Both Jacob and Israel will be restored from the pillaging of the vineyards.

Na2.1,3-10 The military spectacle of the armies of Cyaxares and Nabopolassar.

The rapid approach to the city, the siege, the state of the river, the capture of the place, the lamentation of the inhabitants, the sacking of this immensely wealthy and populous city is described in present tense and with great literary skill.

Na2.11-13 The allegory of the lions' den applied to Nineveh.

Here the picture of the prey that they have made of other nations, will be taken from them. There is a rescue and an air of redemption about this downfall - it will release people from an oppressor and back into the freer community of the nations.

Nahum 1

The judgment and destruction of Nineveh

*Date: around 615 BC just before the fall of Nineveh in 612.
The circumstances of the fall of Nineveh
Outline of the book*

Na3.1-4 The spectacle of the arrival of the enemy troops.

Na3.5-7 Nineveh compared to a harlot.

Reminiscent of the material of Revelation and also of the way the Lord thinks of the great commercial and military empires, Nineveh is likened to a harlot who beguiles nations with her harlotries and sorceries.

The Lord will shame her, expose her and no one will comfort her.

Na3.8-11 The comparison with No-amon, [Thebes of Egypt].

Like Thebes, which perished in 663 BC under the Assyrian armies, Nineveh will fare no better. Both cities were situated astride great rivers and using those rivers as their defences. Put and Lubim, which refers to a part of Africa and Libya, were her possible allies and helpers, but Thebes went into exile.

Na3.11-19 Nineveh, like Thebes will drink of the wrath of God.

Picturing the weakness of the hometown forces as women, and their gates as open to the enemy, Nahum has them madly trying to make bricks to fortify their place.

The image of locusts and grasshoppers portray the enemy troops as, of course, the Assyrians had been to others with numerous agents and commanders.

But, as locusts and hoppers lie dormant on a cold day in walls of the city, so their leaders are asleep, their people scattered and no one to round them up for the fight.

Nineveh's wounds will be mortal - this is the end of the city!