

AP 42

Nahum / נחום / Nah-hoom / Comforted

Nahum is the 7th of the minor prophets, he prophesied in the mid to late 7th century along with Obadiah, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah. Judah was a vassal state, at this time. Before this time, in the 8th and early to mid 7th century, Assyria was at its most powerful as an empire. For example: in 722 Samaria and the Northern kingdom of Israel fell to Assyria; in 701 Jerusalem was besieged; in 663 Thebes (capital of Egypt) fell. Against all odds Jerusalem survived this period - hmmm. Hosea, Amos, Isaiah, and Micah prophesied during these previous insecure and chaotic years. However, after the death of Ashurbanipal (his mother must have hated him) in 627 Assyria crumbled quickly¹. Nineveh (capital of Assyria) fell in 612. Nahum is an oracle prophesying this crumbling of a great power.

Nineveh's fall was obviously good news for the people of Judah, and so the book is considered an oracle of comfort – see the meaning of Nahum's name. Nahum, the book, is characterized by super vivid poetry, full of metaphor and simile. The book is like Obadiah in that it is an oracle against a single nation. Obadiah's focus was Edom. Nahum focus is Assyria. Nahum, the book, provides an interesting contrast with Jonah. Jonah's theme was the mercy and forgiveness that God extended to Nineveh. Nahum's theme is the coming judgement against Nineveh.

Nahum uses Nineveh's end as an example that serves to warn all militaristic nations. Nahum provides a strong rebuke of militarism, a theme that remains quite relevant today.

Sunday, Oct 9

Nahum 1²3 Spotlight verses 7 and 15

For Reflection: This vivid imagery which begins the oracle is a lot like the Micah 1 and Habakkuk 3 (our next book). Nahum sees God as active in history, ultimately acting on behalf of the remnant of his children. *Do you see God, as a God who intervenes in history? When has God's judgement been good news? Is it fair or accurate to consider judgement and love two sides of the same coin?*

Lagniappe: Romans 10:15

¹ Ashurbanipal translates into "Ashur created the heir" so his mom didn't hate him. He was known for an incredible cultural explosion (the Library of Ashurbanipal was the biggest in the world at that time containing over 100,000 texts) and brutality in warfare. He was the last "great" king of Assyria.

² Interesting that neither Nineveh nor Assyria are mentioned in chapter 1

³ This first chapter is an incomplete acrostic poem, with each verse (kinda) beginning with the next letter in the Hebrew alphabet.

Monday, Oct 10 Nahum 2/3⁴

For Reflection: A detailed description of the siege of Nineveh and the coming destruction of the empire. The tone is taunting. *Upon what did the Assyrians base their security or confidence? On what do you base your confidence/security?*

Lagniappe: Psalm 119:114

Habakkuk / חִבְקִיָּק / Habaq-qooq / ???

Habakkuk is the 8th minor prophet, and a contemporary of Nahum, Jeremiah, and Zephaniah. It seems the Judah is now, or soon will be, a vassal to Babylon⁵ (Babylon overthrew Nineveh in 612) – meet the new boss same as the old boss. Judah, during years of Habakkuk, is marked by weakness of central government. Habakkuk describes the situation as lawless (1:2-4) and the people helpless like fish in a net (2:14-17).

Habakkuk is unique in that his oracle is not a typical oracle of judgement or of hope, but a dialogue with God – or we might understand this as prayer. Most prophets speak for God, Habakkuk speaks to God. As a vassal state, Judah was constantly humiliated and Habakkuk asks God what we all want to ask God, “Why do the wicked prosper? Why don’t you intervene?” With the Q & A format that Habakkuk employs, the first two chapters of this book read more like Job. Chapter 3 reads like a Psalm. No chapter in this book is characteristic of the prophetic genre (this atypical form was true of Jonah too).

Tuesday, Oct 11 Habakkuk 1:1-2:1

For Reflection: It may be helpful to see the structure:

Habakkuk’s first complaint/question: 1:2-4.

God’s first answer: 1:5-11.

Habakkuk’s second complaint/question: 1:12-2:1

When have you felt helpless, like a fish in a net? When have you chosen to trust and wait on God, like a soldier at watch?

Lagniappe: Mark 6:34

Wednesday, Oct 12 Habakkuk 2

For Reflection: All but the first verse of this chapter is God’s answer to Habakkuk’s second question. The chapter is structured around 5 warnings – 2:6 (theft); 2:9 (unjust gain), 2:12 (violent lawlessness) 2:15 (shaming) and 19 (idolatry). *In what sense do*

⁴ The taunt of 2:10-12 is given color when you remember that the lion was the symbol of the Assyrian court.

⁵ See 1:6

these warnings cause personal comfort? In what sense do they cause personal concern?

Lagniappe: Matthew 23:27

Thursday, Oct 13 Habakkuk 3

For Reflection: To help Judah through this difficult time Habakkuk reviews God's faithfulness in the Exodus. *When have you seen God intervene in your life in marvelous ways?* You might write a review of God's work in your life. I find the end of this chapter (3:17-19) simply beautiful. *What would happen to your faith if there was no food in the fridge? (3:17-19)*

Lagniappe: Romans 8:28

Zephaniah / צְפַנְיָהּ / Tsuh-phan-iah / He Whom Yahweh Hides

Zephaniah is the 9th of the minor prophets. The first verse helps us date the book and get a clearer understanding of the prophet. The dating is tied to the reign of Josiah (640-609). So, he is a 7th century prophet. The book is likely written no earlier than 640 and likely before Josiah reforms in 621 (2 Chronicles 34/35) – as the oracles of judgement make less sense in a time of reform. The first verse also lets us know that Zephaniah was the great, great grandson of King Hezekiah.⁶

The theme of Zephaniah is the Day of the LORD – Judgement and Hope. Judgement comes to Judah in chapter 1, then to her neighbors in chapter 2, and then we get to an oracle that starts with judgement but transitions to hope for a remnant 3. The sin of Judah with which Zephaniah is concerned is idolatry (1:4-9). Many of the prophets focus on sins against neighbor - like injustice, Zephaniah is concerned with sins against God.

Friday, Oct 14 Zephaniah 1:1-2:3

For Reflection: In the OT the "great day of the LORD" can have an end-of-time tone (1:2-3, 14-18). But more often in the prophets they seem to prophesy a historical day of judgement (722 when Samaria fell and 586 when Jerusalem fell). *When have you turned your back from following God (1:6)? When, how, and why did you return to God (2:3)?*

Lagniappe: Luke 12:40

Saturday, Oct 15 Zephaniah 3

⁶ The genealogy is very unusual among the books of the prophets. It seems Zephaniah is using the fact that he is a great, great grandson of King Hezekiah to his advantage – not a bad thing.

For Reflection: I find the transition from judgement to hope scary. This doesn't sound like blanket forgiveness for Judah but rather a purging, particularly of the leaders (3:1-5). Verse 17 is one of those verses you can memorize and remember on the dark night. *Are verses 14-17 for today – did Jesus bring this age about? Or do they prophesy some time in the future? Or, in some sense, both? Already, and not yet?*

Lagniappe: Matthew 25:31-33 Is this the NT version of the purging in chapter 3?