

Tuesday Evening Bible Study  
Series #8: The Minor Prophets  
Session #14: Nahum & Habakkuk  
Tuesday, May 2, 2017

### **Summary of Nahum**

The name “Nahum” means comfort or consolation. The only thing we know about Nahum is found in 1:1 which says he was from Elkosh, but we don't know where that was because it is not mentioned elsewhere in the Bible. Nahum addresses the afflicted community of Judah to announce the demise of Assyria and its capital Nineveh. The community of Judah, along with many other countries, has suffered from Assyrian tyranny and violence. The question of whether or not anyone can escape the cruelty of Assyria is answered by God's standing against Assyria. The destruction of Assyria is announced through speeches formally addressed to the king of Assyria and Nineveh, but the actual audience is Judah. Both the past affliction that Judah has experienced and the coming destruction of Assyria are the work of God, as well as the usual ebb and flow of turbulent political forces.

### **When was Nahum written?**

The book is written after the Assyrian destruction of No-amon, or Thebes in 663 BCE (Nahum 3:8-10). How much after is not clear. The successful revolt of Babylon in 626 BCE. marks the beginning of the unraveling of the Assyrian empire. The destruction of Nineveh in 612 B.C.E. marks the end. It is common to presume that the book was written close to the latter date.

### **Major Theological Themes**

- 1) Destruction of embodied evil.
- 2) Jealousy and vengeance of God versus adversaries.
- 3) “Celebrate your festivals, O Judah, fulfill your vows,  
for never again shall the wicked invade you;  
they are utterly cut off.” (Nahum 1:15)

### **Outline of Nahum**

- A. Superscription (1:1)
- B. A psalm about God's power (1:2-8)
- C. God's power against Nineveh and restoration for God's people (1:9-15)
- D. Oracles against Nineveh and Assyria (2:1-3:19)
  1. The siege of Nineveh (2:1-12)
  2. Nineveh will be destroyed (2:13 – 3:19)

### **Notes about Nahum**

- In the first verse (superscription), Nahum is described as an “oracle” (=burden) against Nineveh. Nahum is the only prophetic text that is explicitly called a book.
- Verse 4 – May be an allusion to Near Eastern cosmologies in which the River and Sea represent deities who are defeated by a more powerful god. Bashan, Carmel,

and Lebanon are known for their agricultural fertility, but God is powerful enough to dry them up.

- Note the shift in person starting at verse 9. It is impossible to capture the shifts in masculine and feminine “you” forms in English. The second person pronouns that first appear in 1:9 shift from masculine plural to feminine singular in 1:11-13, to masculine singular in 1:14, and finally back to feminine singular in 1:15, where Judah is explicitly named. While it is easy to read all the second-person pronouns beginning in 2:1 as referring to Nineveh, readers must decide between Judah and Nineveh in 1:9-14. The NIV inserts Nineveh in 1:11 and 1:14 (as well as 1:8 and 2:1) and Judah in 1:12. The NRSV retains the ambiguity. The ambiguity opens up the possibility of a chiding word directed to Judah in 1:9 or 1:11, but the issue cannot be resolved definitively. Readers must settle for the overall flow of the account, which clearly points to Nineveh's demise and Judah's restoration from affliction.
- Chapters 2 & 3 are oracles concerning the king of Assyria and Nineveh, the capital. The king is addressed specifically in 3:18 and by assumption in 2:1. Nineveh is addressed intermittently throughout.
- 3:8-10 – refer to Thebes which was captured by the Assyrians under Ashurbanipal in 663 BCE, despite being allied with Ethiopia (Nubia), Egypt, Put (location unknown), and Libya.
- Nahum ends with the prophecy that the Assyrian king will get what he dished out to other neighboring people: death and suffering.

### **How is Nahum relevant to us today?**

There are destructive forces equivalent to Assyria/Nineveh. The question all readers must face is whether they see themselves in Assyria/Nineveh or in Judah. The latter are promised deliverance from the very forces that up to this point have also been instruments of God's action. The former must face the end of its destructive impunity.

### **Resources**

*Enterthebible.com*, <https://www.enterthebible.org/oldtestament>

*Bible.org*, <https://bible.org/seriespage/7-nahum>

Notes from The New Oxford Annotated Bible (NRSV), 2010

Notes from HarperCollins Study Bible (NRSV), 1989

Notes from *The CEB Women's Bible* (CEB), 2016

## **Summary of Habakkuk**

Habakkuk's name means to "embrace" or "wrestle." As is usually the case, his name has something to do with the message of the book. I think it relates to the fact that he was wrestling with a difficult issue. If God is good, then why is there evil in the world? And if there has to be evil, then why do the evil prosper? What is God doing in the world? Habakkuk opens by protesting God's inaction in the face of injustice and violence: the wicked thrive at the expense of the righteous. God responds by announcing the invasion of the Babylonians to exact punishment. Habakkuk protests that God's use of the Babylonians is an injustice worse than the injustice they are to punish. God responds by announcing a future judgment of the Babylonians for their own unrighteous acts. Habakkuk, while poised to wait for the eventual judgment of Babylon, receives a vision that evokes memories of past deliverance, both historic and cosmic. The vision engenders a resolve to endure based on God's past and promised character. The book is about God's relationship to the present experience of violence and injustice. Unlike most other prophetic books, it does not directly address an audience. Instead, Habakkuk takes up the question of the attentiveness of God to the demise of righteous sufferers and the free range that the wicked have over against them. Through dialogue with God, Habakkuk embodies a way to live in the time between present suffering and future deliverance. Lamenting, petitioning, and trembling are coupled with confident rejoicing in God's commitment to deliver.

## **When was it written?**

The Chaldeans (Babylonians) remain a threat, even in the final, edited form of the book. Thus, a date between the invasion of 597 B.C.E. and the destruction of 587 B.C.E. is the likely historical period for the origin of the book of Habakkuk.

## **Major Theological Themes**

- 1) Concern for rampant injustice.
- 2) Effort at presenting God as powerful and just in the face of injustice; God sometimes seems to be inactive, but he is involved.
- 3) God hears and answers prayers.
- 4) God sometimes gives unexpected answers to our prayers.
- 5) God is Just and God is Good.
- 6) Assertion that righteousness and faith are inseparable; the righteous live by faith and faithfulness.
- 7) Reminder that God is one's hope and salvation in times of trouble.

## **Outline of Habakkuk**

- A. Part 1: Habakkuk's Dialogue with God (Habakkuk 1:1-2:20)
  1. Superscription (Habakkuk 1:1)
  2. Habakkuk's First Lament: The Wicked Oppress the Righteous! (Habakkuk 1:2-4)
  3. God's Response: The Chaldeans Will Punish the Wicked (Habakkuk 1:5-11)
  4. Habakkuk's Second Lament: Why Use Wickedness to Punish Wickedness? (Habakkuk 1:12-2:1)

5. God's Response: The Punisher's Own Injustice Will Not Endure (Habakkuk 2:2-20)
- B. Part 2: Habakkuk's Prayer (Habakkuk 3:1-19)
  1. Superscription (Habakkuk 3:1)
  2. Habakkuk's Prayer or Divine Warrior Hymn (Habakkuk 3:2-19)
    - a) God's greatness (Habakkuk 3:3-15)
    - b) The prophet's response (Habakkuk 3:16-19)

### **Notes about Habakkuk**

- Habakkuk's psalm is a psalm of lament.
- Questions of theodicy throughout: If God is good, why does he not act?
- V. 14 – “people” = ‘*adam*’ (the same word used in Genesis to mean “humankind.”)
- Shigionoth – musical and liturgical term. That and ‘Selah’ at the end of verses may indicate that the prayer was used in the temple.
- Like other prophets, Habakkuk uses rivers and the sea to stress the magnitude of God's power.

### **How is Habakkuk relevant to us today?**

Have you ever finished watching the evening news with all the violence and injustice in the world and in frustration asked, “Why isn't God doing something? Why do the wicked and the dishonest people prosper. Why do they get elected to the White House?” Well, that is not a new feeling. A prophet named Habakkuk felt that way around 620 B.C. and wrote a book about it.

Habakkuk expresses the attitude that many righteous people have. He is outraged at the violence and injustice in his society. He lists six different problems. His list is repetitious, but it emphasizes just how bad things were. There was sin, wickedness, destruction and violence, no justice in the courts, and the wicked outnumbered the righteous. Does this sound like our society? Habakkuk is about God's relationship to the present experience of violence and injustice. Lamenting, petitioning, and trembling are coupled with confident rejoicing in God's commitment to deliver.

The message of Habakkuk is very comforting to us because we live in a wicked society. We can look back at what Habakkuk wrote, see that it came true, that God really is in control, that God did protect the righteous even though they went to Babylon (e.g. Daniel, Shadrack, Meshack and Abednego) and He eventually brought them back to the land. Faith in God can be bolstered by the prophecy and historical events that show that God's word is true.

### **Resources**

*Enterthebible.com*, <https://www.enterthebible.org/oldtestament>

*Bible.org*, <https://bible.org/seriespage/habakkuk>

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