

NAHUM, BOOK OF The seventh book of the twelve Minor Prophets in the Hebrew Bible. The superscription of the book reads: "An Oracle concerning Nineveh. The Book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite." Outside the Bible, Nahum (*naḥûm*, comfort) is a well-attested NW Semitic name (Cathcart 1979: 1). However, nothing is known about the prophet Nahum, and even the place of his origin, Elkosh, has not been identified. Jerome (CChr 76 A, 526) proposed "Elcesaei," a village in Galilee; Pseudo-Epiphanius (*PG* 43, 409) placed it in Judea; and there have been several attempts by modern scholars to locate the site of the ancient town (for bibliography, see Cathcart 1973:38).

A. Text

Recently-discovered witnesses of the text of Nahum discovered in modern times include the Peshet of Nahum (4QpNah) found at Qumran; the Hebrew Scroll of the Minor Prophets from Wâdî Murabba.ât (Mur 88); and fragments of the Greek text of the Minor Prophets from Naḥal Hever (8 HevXIIgr) (Barthélemy 1963). There are no significant variants in the text of Nahum in these scrolls, and the student of the text should probably pay more attention to linguistic investigation than to dubious textual reconstruction.

Ugaritic studies have alerted us to the precise usage of *šārâ* in Nah 1:9, though *BHS* still recommends emendation of the text to *šārāyw*. The interpretation of *yōdēa*, "cares for, is friendly to," in 1:7 is further supported by *KTU* 1.114.7 (*il dyd. nn*, "the god friendly to him"); and *pēlādôt* in 2:4 may mean "blankets," "coverings," or even "caparisons" in the light of Ug *pld*. The word *mnzr* in 3:17 has yet to be satisfactorily explained: if it is a military term, it may be a corruption of *ḥnznr*, a term for some kind of military personnel at Ugarit. However, in the light of recent study of Neo-Assyrian preoccupation with astrology and magic, H. Torczyner (1936: 7) was almost certainly correct in reading *manzāzayik*, since in Neo-Assyrian sources the *manzazē* were officials of the palace, including "astrologers, augurs, magicians" etc. (Parpola 1970–71, I:2). In that same verse, the parallel term *ḫipsārayik* is equivalent to Akk *ḫupšarru*, a word used for "astrologer" in Neo-Assyrian texts (Parpola 1970–71, I: 2).

The recently discovered bilingual inscription from Tell Fakhariyeh contains the word *qlqlt* in line 22 of the Aramaic text, and its equivalent in the Neo-Assyrian text, *tupqinnu*, makes it clear that the meaning is "rubbish dump, refuse heap" (Abou-Assaf et al. 1982: 21, 36). This text, and the occurrence in another Neo-Assyrian text (*Afo* 8 iv 16) of the word *kiqillutu*, "refuse dump" (probably a loanword from W Semitic), may throw light on Nah 1:14, *asîm qibreka kî qallôtâ*. This new evidence supports the *BHS* apparatus, which suggests reading *qîqâlôt* or *qîqâlôn*, yielding the translation, "I will make your grave a refuse heap."

Finally, more attention is now being given to techniques in classical Hebrew poetry (Watson 1984), and further research in this area will be useful in the assessment of the results of redaction-criticism and of other methods used in the study of the biblical books.

B. Date

The superscription of the book does not mention any date, but it is clear that the reference to the Assyrian sacking of Thebes (No-Amon; 3:8) in 663 B.C. provides the earliest possible date. There is an impression that Nineveh, which fell in 612, was still standing at the time of the oracles, though it is not impossible that the oracles were composed shortly after it fell. However, there is widespread agreement that a date for the oracles should be sought between 663 and 612, but a more precise dating is very difficult to achieve. Two possibilities have been suggested. The first dates the book to ca. 625 B.C., when Nabopolassar emerged as the leader of an aggressive Babylonia, a development which must have given heart to those peoples who hated the oppressing Assyrians. The second possible date is shortly before 612 B.C., just as the Assyrian empire was entering its death throes, since in 614 B.C. the Medes (under Cyaxares) had already taken Assur and would soon take Nineveh. W. Maier (1959: 31) counters that Nineveh had already become weak and degenerate after the death of Assurbanipal in 626 B.C., and he prefers to date Nahum shortly before 654 B.C., a few years after the sack of Thebes (Maier 1959: 36).

C. Contents

Following the superscription (1:1), the contents may be summarized as follows:

1:2–8	Hymn of Theophany
1:9–2:3(—Eng 2:2)	Threat, Promise, and Judgment
2:4(—Eng 2:3)–3:19	The Fall of Nineveh

1. Hymn of Theophany. The sayings and oracles of Nahum are introduced by a hymn of theophany (1:2–8). There has been much discussion as to the extent of the psalm because of its partial alphabetic acrostic character. According to F. Delitzsch (*Psalms* BC³, 117), this was first noticed by a certain pastor G. Frohnmeyer. Unfortunately, this observation by Frohnmeyer prompted a number of scholars to carry out major critical surgery on the first chapter of Nahum in an attempt to reconstruct a complete alphabetic acrostic, and when G. Bickell (1880: 559–60; 1882:211–13; 1894) and H. Gunkel (1893: 223–44; 1895:102–6) presented their reconstructions, W. R. Arnold protested that these scholars had "decapitated a masterpiece of Hebrew literature" (1901: 236). In recent years critics have not been quite so ardent, and few scholars have pursued the acrostic beyond vv 8 or 9 (see, e.g., Christensen 1975:17–30).

There is considerable debate concerning the date of the psalm. It is unlikely that the psalm was composed by Nahum, but given the incomplete nature of the acrostic, it may be that either Nahum modified an already existing psalm and used it as an introduction to his oracles, or a subsequent editor placed it before Nahum's actual oracles. In any event, the hymn does not reflect any particular historical situation; rather it is a typical hymn of theophany, and its language is similar to that of the Canaanite descriptions of the theophany of the storm god Ba'al (Cathcart 1975: 68–71). Of particular interest is the reference in 1:4 to Yahweh's roar at the Sea (*yām*) / Rivers (*nēhārôt*), which recalls the conflict between Ba'al and the Sea/Rivers in the texts from Ugarit. Like Ba'al at Ugarit, Yahweh is portrayed as a storm god, a warrior, and a king, and it is the recognition of these motifs that is important for understanding the book of Nahum as a whole and the relationship between the psalm and the oracles in particular (see below).

2. Threat, Promise, and Judgment. Verses 1:9–2:3 have been adjudged by many critics to be in disorder. Verse 9 seems to be addressed to the enemies of Yahweh in general, but since this verse is probably a link between the psalm and the following oracles, one can safely assume that the Assyrians are the specific enemy. A linguistic argument in favor of taking v 9 as a link-verse is the presence of *klh .šh* ("he will make a full end") in vv 8 and 9, and *hšb* ("to plot") in vv 9 and 11

Verses 10–11 and 14 are further threats against the enemy, but v 11 is clearly directed against Nineveh, while v 14 is directed against the king of Assyria. This series of threats is interrupted by vv 12–13, which are promises to Judah.

Chapter 2 opens with a series of imperatives, typical messenger formulae announced by the *mēbaššēr*, the courier of Yahweh the divine warrior, who is about to wage war against the Assyrians. (On the *mēbaššēr*, see Miller 1973:12–23, 66–74; and *CMHE*, 229). In 2:1 (—Eng 1:15) there is a message of salvation to Judah and in 2:2 (—Eng 2:1) a message of judgment to Nineveh. Verse 3 (—Eng v 2) states clearly the objective of Yahweh's war against Assyria, namely to deliver his people and restore "the glory of Jacob, indeed the glory of Israel."

3. The Fall of Nineveh. Nah 2:4–14 (—Eng 2:3–13) and 3:1–19 contain a superb description of the assault on Nineveh and its panic and downfall. Nah 2:4–14 (—Eng 2:3–13) is a self-contained unit, but it is difficult to say the same of 3:1–19. Perhaps with Eissfeldt (1965: 414) we should divide it as follows: 3:1–7 describing the destruction and humiliation of Nineveh; 3:8–17, a passage full of derision and irony, stressing the futility of Nineveh's efforts to defend itself; and finally 3:18–19, a dirge or funeral lament.

D. Interpretation

G. Fohrer (1968: 451) is willing to allow "some genuinely prophetic insights" in Nahum, but he is inclined to view the prophet as a "representative of optimistic prophecy with a strong feeling of nationalism." Because there is no condemnation of Israel or call to repentance in the oracles but, on the contrary, a great exultation over the fall of Nineveh, scholars have attributed a virulent nationalism to Nahum and have even alleged that he tends to exhibit the characteristics of false prophecy. Haldar (1947) believes that the book of Nahum originated in cultic circles and that in it the historical enemy is identified with cosmic foes. In other words, there is an element of propaganda in the book. Haldar's views have been widely rejected, but some of his insights in connection with myth deserve attention. Jeremias (1970: 11–55) and Schulz (1973) have not been convincing, and it seems more sensible to try and interpret the material as we have it, rather than engage in wholesale dismembering and reconstruction of the text (Schulz) or in speculation that some oracles against Nineveh were originally directed against Jerusalem/Israel (Jeremias). However, this does not mean that some editorial or redactional process has not taken place, especially with regard to 1:9–2:3 (see *IOTS*, 444; Coggins 1982: 80).

The introductory hymn of theophany (1:2–8) plays an important role in the book, and scholars have not pursued sufficiently their general observations that in it there is a strong sense of the sovereignty of God and a portrayal of Yahweh's lordship over history. The "Avenging God" (1:2, *ēl nōqēm*) is the one who as king and judge will punish the Assyrians to save Israel. The overthrow and sacking of Nineveh were historical acts of war by the Medes and Babylonians, but more importantly they were acts of war by Yahweh. The "scatterer" (2:2, *mēpiš*) who attacks Nineveh is "the jealous and avenging God," "the Lord of Wrath," who rages against his enemies. He is a mighty warrior, "great in power" (1:3, *gēdōl kōah*) who directs the earthly "mighty warriors" (2:4) against Nineveh. The Lord of the Storm who overcomes the Sea (1:3–4) to establish his dominion and assert his kingship is Yahweh the King, who decides the fate of the king of Assyria (1:14; cf. 3:18).

E. Nahum and the Day of Yahweh

Chapters 2 and 3 of Nahum have a number of lines and phrases which are similar to some found in those biblical passages which speak of the Day of Yahweh. It is true that a common "war-language" is to be expected, but, nevertheless, it is remarkable that a number of lines and phrases are found only in Nahum and the classic Day of Yahweh texts (Cathcart 1975: 72–76). (Compare Nah 1:10 with Joel 2:5, Obadiah 18, and Mal 3:19; Nah 2:5 [—Eng 2:4] with Jer 46:9, Joel 2:9, and Amos 5:16; Nah 2:9 [—Eng 2:8] with Jer 46:5, 21;

Nah 2:10 [—Eng 2:9] with Isa 2:7; Nah 2:11 with Isa 13:7–8 and Joel 2:6; Nah 3:2 with Joel 2:5; and Nah 3:10 with Isa 13:16, Joel 4:2, and Obadiah 11)

R. H. Charles spoke of the Day of Yahweh as follows: “This conception is related to the people as a whole, and not to the individual. It means essentially the day on which Yahweh manifests Himself in victory over his foes” (1913: 86–87). It is not surprising therefore that Charles included Nahum in his discussion of the Day of Yahweh, though it seems he is the only scholar who has done so.

The motifs of the Day of Yahweh appear in Nahum, for that “day” was “a day of judgment,” when Yahweh punished the guilty because Yahweh as Divine King was also Judge Supreme. The day was also a “day of victory” on which Yahweh asserted his kingship and lordship over creation. If J. Day, after his recent assessment of the Ugaritic and OT evidence, is correct in his view that “the motif of Yahweh’s Kingship, and with it the *Chaoskampf* . . . had its *Sitz im Leben* in the Feast of Tabernacles at New Year’s eve” (1985: 21), then perhaps some of the work of earlier scholars like P. Humbert, who associated Nahum with the New Year, deserves more attention. See also DAY OF YAHWEH.

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