Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah

Short books, Big messages
Approaching Nahum

• Who was Nahum and what were his times?

• What are the structure and themes in Nahum?

• How does Nahum point us forward to Jesus and the NT?
Approaching Nahum

- Who was Nahum and what were his times?

  - We don’t know anything about Nahum beyond the superscription (1:1): His name means “comfort” and his message comforted God’s people.

  - We aren’t sure where Elkosh is, either. Four suggestions:
    - Near Assyria at a site called Al-Kush; Nahum a descendent of an exiled northern Israelite family
    - In Galilee at a site called El-Kauzeh
    - Capernaum on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee; a possibly etymology for Capernaum is “Nahum’s city”
    - A location in Judah near the modern Beit Jibrin
Approaching Nahum

• Who was Nahum and what were his times?

  • Nahum likely prophesied during the reign of the Assyrian king Assurbanipal (668-627 BC; see chart):

    • During his reign, he defeated Thebes, the ancient capital of Egypt in 664 BC (see Nahum 3:8). And the prophecy had to have taken place before the fall of Ninevah in 612 BC to the Babylonians.

    • Longman/Dillard argue that it had to have taken place between 652 BC (an Assyrian Civil War between Ashurbanipal and his brother) and 631 BC (the beginning of a regency in Assyria that signaled significant weakening in the empire.
### Assyrian/Babylonian Kings

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<th>Period</th>
<th>King</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>755-745 BC</td>
<td>Ashur-nirari V</td>
<td>likely repentant king in Jonah’s day</td>
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<tr>
<td>745-727 BC</td>
<td>Tiglath-pileser III</td>
<td>Annexes Israel and Judah as vassal states</td>
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<tr>
<td>726-722 BC</td>
<td>Shalmaneser V</td>
<td>fall of Israel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>721-705 BC</td>
<td>Sargon II</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>704-681 BC</td>
<td>Sennacherib</td>
<td>attacks Judah; Isa 36-39</td>
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<tr>
<td>680-669 BC</td>
<td>Esarhaddon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>668-627 BC</td>
<td>Assurbanipal</td>
<td>Defeats Thebes in 664 BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>668-627 BC</td>
<td>Babylon: Samas-sum-ukin</td>
<td>War with Assyria in 652 BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>627-605 BC</td>
<td>Babylon: Nabopolassar</td>
<td>Fall of Assyria in 612 BC</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Approaching Nahum

- What are the structure and themes in Nahum?
  - The main theme in Nahum: Yahweh, Israel’s God, is the one who rules the nations. His character is just and his purpose will stand (1:1-15)
    - His character (1:2-6):
      - A God of vengeance and wrath against his enemies (1:2)
      - A God of justice and power (1:3)
      - No one can stand against him when he comes in judgment (1:4-6)
Approaching Nahum

• What are the structure and themes in Nahum?

  • The main theme in Nahum: Yahweh, Israel’s God, is the one who rules the nations. His character is just and his purpose will stand (1:1-15)

    • His purpose (1:7-15): here Nahum intertwines God’s twin purposes for Judah and Assyria.

      • Summary (1:7-8)

      • Judah: “He cares for those who trust in him” (1:12-13, 15, 2:2)

      • Assyria: “he will make an end of Nineveh” (1:9-11, 14)
Approaching Nahum

• What are the structure and themes in Nahum?

• The oracles against Assyria: “I am against you” (2:13; 3:5)—Nahum alternates oracles and taunt songs.

• Oracle #1: The armies come against Nineveh (2:1-10)

• Taunt song #1: “Where now is the lions’ den?” (2:11-13)—God’s sword will devour your young lions; you will have no prey, no messengers, no name on the earth.
Approaching Nahum

• What are the structure and themes in Nahum?

  • The oracles against Assyria: “I am against you” (2:13; 3:5)—Nahum alternates oracles and taunt songs.

    • Oracle #2: This judgment comes by God’s command (3:1-7)

      • The reason: their idol worship—the goddess Ishtar was the patron of prostitutes, the goddess of fertility, sex, and war (3:4)

    • Taunt song #2: “Are you better than Thebes?” (3:7-19)—In the same way that you executed God’s judgment against Egypt, so God will execute judgment against your weak fortresses and troops.
Approaching Nahum

• How does Nahum point us forward to Jesus and the NT?
  
  • God’s character means that his purposes will be filled: salvation for those who trust in him; judgment to those who do not (1:2-8).

  • God is determined to restore “the splendor of Judah like the splendor of Israel” (2:2), even though they have known affliction and destruction: which happens through Jesus the Davidic King.

  • The one who brings good news (1:15; cf. Isa 40:9; Rom 10:15) tells about God’s salvation—God will deal with wickedness in his world through Jesus Christ.
Approaching Habakkuk

• Who was Habakkuk and what were his times?

• What are the structure and themes in Habakkuk?

• How does Habakkuk point us forward to Jesus and the NT?
Approaching Habakkuk

• Who was Habakkuk and what were his times?

  • Again, like with Nahum and Joel, we don’t know anything about Habakkuk (1:1, 3:1).

    • While he may have had some connection to the temple (2:20; 3:1, 19), even that is not certain.

  • He prophesied toward the end of Judah’s history, perhaps during Josiah’s reign (640-609 BC; see chart)

    • While the Babylonians were a rising threat (1:6), they were not yet a world power

    • Even though Judah had experienced reform under Josiah (2 Kings 23), there was still corruption from Manasseh’s reign (2 Kings 23:26-28)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>627 BC</td>
<td>Babylon successfully rebels against Assyrian rule and establishes itself independently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>612 BC</td>
<td>Nabopolassar defeats Assyria and establishes Neo-Babylonian empire</td>
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<tr>
<td>609 BC</td>
<td><strong>Josiah</strong> dies at Meggido, fighting against the Egyptian leader, Neco (as part of a Babylonian alliance?); <strong>Jehoahaz</strong> succeeds—but the Egyptians replace him with <strong>Jehoiakim</strong>.</td>
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<tr>
<td>607 BC</td>
<td>Nabopolassar dies; Nebuchadnezzar becomes ruler in his place</td>
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<tr>
<td>605 BC</td>
<td>Nebuchadnezzar defeats Egyptian Pharaoh Neco at Carchemish; Jehoiakim shifts his alliance from Egypt to Babylon; Babylon takes its first group of exiles from Judah (cf. Dan 1:1-7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>598 BC</td>
<td>Jehoiakim rebels against Babylon, but dies before he suffers the consequences. <strong>Jehoiachin</strong> reigns for three months before Nebuchadnezzar marches to Jerusalem, deposes Jehoiachin and replaces him with <strong>Zedekiah</strong>—Babylon takes its second group of exiles (cf. Eek 1:1-3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>586 BC</td>
<td>Zedekiah intrigues with other nations (especially Egypt), but ultimately is destroyed by Babylon: Nebuchadnezzar conquers Jerusalem, destroys temple. Appoints Gedaliah to be governor (Jer 40:5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Approaching Habakkuk

• What are the structure and themes in Habakkuk?

• Habakkuk has a fascinating structure: it is an “oracle” and yet it has three different times of literature—a dialogue; a taunt song; and a prayer song.

• Dialogue: Complaints and Answers (1:1-2:5)

  • First complaint and answer (1:1-11)

    • Habakkuk complains to God about the wickedness that he sees in Judah—his question centers on how God “idly looks at wrong” (1:3)

    • God responds by telling Habakkuk that he is not idle: he will deal with Judah’s wickedness by “raising up the Chaldeans” to punish them (1:6)
Approaching Habakkuk

• What are the structure and themes in Habakkuk?
  • Dialogue: Complaints and Answers (1:1-2:5)
    • Second complaint and answer (1:12-2:5)
      • Habakkuk is stunned: this answer raises a second question/complaint—how could God idly look at traitors and use the wicked/idolators to punish his people (1:12-2:1)?
      • God doesn’t answer the why question: rather, he tells Habakkuk
        • The righteous person actually lives by faith in God (2:4)
        • God is the judge of all the nations; he will do what is right (2:5)
Approaching Habakkuk

• What are the structure and themes in Habakkuk?
  
  • Taunt song: God will put a song in his people’s mouth against their enemy (2:6-20)

  • But God will not abandon his people or let Babylon escape—there will be judgment upon Babylon too and God’s people will sing this taunt song made up of _five woes_.

  • God’s ultimate purpose is his glory (2:14) and God’s ultimate throne is his heavenly temple (2:20)—he rules over all things.
Approaching Habakkuk

• What are the structure and themes in Habakkuk?

  • Prayer song: Habakkuk sings a song in which he learns to live by faith (3:1-19)

  • God’s judgment is certain (2:2-3), so the question is how will Habakkuk respond (3:1-2)?

  • He remembers how God acted in times past, especially during the Exodus (3:3-15)

  • And so, he will trust that God will act in the coming time of trouble, even though he is scared to death (3:16-19)
Approaching Habakkuk

• How does Habakkuk point us forward to Jesus and the NT?

  • God’s intention is to fill the earth with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (2:14; cf. Isa 11:9)

  • The way that will happen is as God’s people live by faith in his promise to save those who trust in Jesus Christ (2:4; Rom 1:16-17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38)
Approaching Zephaniah

• Who was Zephaniah and what were his times?

• What are the structure and themes in Zephaniah?

• How does Zephaniah point us forward to Jesus and the NT?
Approaching Zephaniah

• Who was Zephaniah and what were his times?
  
  • Zephaniah identifies himself as part of a royal line that goes back to Hezekiah (1:1; cf. 2 Kings 21:1-26).
    
    • That means he would have been a relative of Josiah, the king during whose reign he prophesies (1:1; Josiah’s reign was 640-609 BC).
    
    • He would’ve been a contemporary of Jeremiah and Habakkuk; he would’ve prophesied just after Nahum.
    
  • Based on what he sees as Judah’s characteristic sins, he probably prophesied before Josiah’s reforms took hold in 622 BC (2 Kings 22-23).
    
    • Manasseh and Amon’s reigns were especially evil—Amon was assassinated (2 Kings 21:19-26)—and provided material for both Habakkuk and Zephaniah.
Approaching Zephaniah

• What are the structure and themes in Zephaniah?

• As with Joel and Amos, the “Day of the Lord” theme is significant for Zephaniah (see chart).

• When the Day of the Lord is referenced, it is the “day” of judgment and salvation, a time when God will intervene powerfully and decisively in human history to bring about his saving plan.

• In Zephaniah, the Day of the Lord comes to the world generally—creation and the nations—and Judah specifically, both in judgment and salvation.
Day of the Lord in the Prophets

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<td>Judgment</td>
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<td>Proud &amp; idolatrous</td>
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<td>Nations/Israel/Nature</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zeph 1:1-3:20</td>
<td>Judah</td>
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<td>Zeph 3:8-20</td>
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<td>Joel 1:1-3:21</td>
<td>Judah/nations/God’s people</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joel 3:18-20</td>
<td>Judah</td>
<td>Salvation</td>
<td>Agricultural prosperity</td>
<td>Paradise</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Approaching Zephaniah

• What are the structure and themes in Zephaniah?

  • The coming Day of the Lord (1:1-18)

    • Zephaniah interweaves the judgment coming upon the world (1:2-3, 14-18) with the judgment coming upon Judah (1:4-13).

    • The judgment comes upon Judah for its idolatry (1:4-6): Baal worship, moon and star worship, Molech worship.

    • The judgment also comes upon Judah for its complacency (1:12)

    • Yahweh is pictured as a Divine Warrior coming to bring vengeance against all peoples: “all who live on the earth” (1:2-3, 18)
Approaching Zephaniah

• What are the structure and themes in Zephaniah?

• The nations judged (2:1-3:8)
  • While there is a general call to repentance, there is judgment declared upon the surrounding nations (cf. Amos 1:3-2:3; Isaiah; Jeremiah)

• The restoration of God’s people (3:9-20)
  • The Day of the Lord is also a day of salvation for God’s people—God promises many blessings upon the nations (3:9—“the peoples that all of them may call on the name of the Lord”)

Approaching Zephaniah

• How does Zephaniah point us forward to Jesus and the NT?

• Zephaniah 3:17 promises that God will dwell in the midst of his people and marry them in great joy—a promise that comes to fruition in and through Jesus (John 1:14; Eph 5:22-33).

• Zephaniah 3:9-20 promises that the nations shall be part of Zion and that all shall be restored—the lame, the outcast, the shamed (3:19).