

OUTLINE STUDIES IN THE BOOKS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

by

Prof. William G. Moorehead

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CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

NAHUM

Of the author of this prophecy we have no more knowledge than is afforded us by the scanty title, which leaves both his nativity and his age uncertain. He is called the Elkoshite, 1:1. But where Elkosh was situated is a disputed point. Jerome records that it was a village in Galilee, and says that its ruins were shown him as he traveled through that country. But Jerome lived nearly one thousand years after Nahum. Others locate it in Assyria where his tomb was declared to be. The internal evidences favor Palestine rather than Assyria as the scene of the prophet's ministry (1:4, 5). Henderson is of opinion that Capernaum, which he translates "*the village of Nahum,*" may have been the home of the prophet. But no certainty as to his birth place can be had. The date of the book can be determined with as little precision. Some think he was contemporary with Habakkuk, others with Manasseh, but the majority that he prophesied during the reign of Hezekiah. Home assigns it to 720-698 B. C; Knobel 713-711 B. C. Others bring it down to a later time, B. C. 700-636. But in all cases the book is placed at a time prior to the fulfillment of the event it predicts. Nineveh was destroyed B. C. 606 or 612. The probability is that the "vision" was seen by Nahum one hundred years before the event took place.

The subject of the prophecy is announced in the superscription, 1:1: "**The burden of Nineveh.**" Organic unity is maintained throughout, the three chapters into which the book is divided form a consecutive whole. The style is elevated and graphic, its imagery majestic and bold, and its tone solemn and terrible in the highest degree. The entire prophecy is aimed against Nineveh, the metropolis of Assyria. It sounds the death-knell of the proud, luxurious and wealthy city. It denounces God's heaviest judgments against the guilty place and predicts its final and complete overthrow and extinction. We note some of the causes that provoked the divine wrath against it.

1. *Impenitence of the people.*

More than a hundred years before Nahum, Jonah preached to Nineveh, and the whole city gave itself up to repentance. From the sovereign on the throne to the humblest subject, all united in confession, humiliation, and earnest appeal to God for mercy. But great as was the result of Jonah's preaching at the time, it was not permanent. A brief period served to blot out the memory of the doom which that prophet announced, and which was averted by their contrition and humiliation. They turned again with redoubled zest to their old brutal customs.

The repentance was not followed by any lasting amendment of life. Hence, as always happens in the like cases, their last end was worse than the first.

2. Assyrian pride.

It was proverbial. The insolent message of Sennacherib to Hezekiah (II Kings 18:13) was but a specimen of it. Nahum lived and prophesied, probably, at the time when the arrogance of Assyria reached its climax. God and His laws were despised, and the rights of men and nations trampled on by the haughty power.

3. Assyrian cruelty was also proverbial, 3:1-3.

Nineveh is called "the bloody city." In it the hiss of the whip and heavy sound of the scourge were constantly heard. Rarely did the Assyrians show mercy to the conquered and the captive. It was their custom to stamp out their foes, leaving no vestige of city or hamlet behind. In the excavations made at Nineveh the evidences of cruelty are abundant, cruelty of the most barbarous sort. A common method of torture was to flay their victims alive. Nahum represents their ferocity as that of the lion, 2:11, 12.

4. Idolatry.

It was of the most degrading kind, and as is always the case, witchcraft, sorcery, necromancy and demon worship were associated with it. There were found those strange, hideous composite figures which were the principal idols of Assyria, viz., the huge winged monsters which the antiquarians have exhumed and exhibited to the civilized world. The body of the idol is that of a bull or a lion, generally the former; the head and face are human; two immense wings are attached to the shoulders. They seem to have been designed to represent the divine principle by the various forms of animal life, beast, bird and man.

5. Oppression of God's people, Israel.

While God used Assyria as His rod to punish the stubborn and rebellious ten tribes, He nevertheless held that power responsible for all its abuse of the ascendancy He had permitted it to gain over His people. And Assyria, like Babylon and Persia in aftertimes, did exceed all just bounds in its dealings with its captives; therefore, judgment visited it in turn.

The destruction and utter desolation of Nineveh is described by Nahum with magnificent eloquence, and with marvelous detail.

1. *It was predicted that "with an overrunning flood he will make an utter end of the place,"* 1, 8. The allusion is to an invading army, no doubt that of the Medes and Babylonians who attacked Nineveh and completely demolished it.

2. *The Tigris was to assist in its overthrow, 2:6.* This was fulfilled.

The ancient historian, Diodorus Siculus, mentions an old prophecy that Nineveh should not be taken until the river (Tigris) should become its enemy. He adds that when the assailants attacked it the river burst its banks and washed away the wall for twenty stadia.

3. *It was to be destroyed partly by fire*, 3:13, 15. This, too, was literally fulfilled. In excavations which have been made on the site it is discovered that one of the gates, and most of the buildings had been burnt.

4. *The population was to be surprised when unprepared, “while they are drunk as drunkards they shall be devoured as stubble fully dry,”* 1:10. Diodorus states that the last and fatal assault was made when they were overcome with wine.

In the remains that have been exhumed carousing scenes are represented, in which the king, his courtiers, and even the queen, reclining on couches or seated on thrones, and attended by musicians, appear to be pledging each other in bowls of wine.

5. *It was to be despoiled of its idols*, 1:14; *and of its silver and gold*, 2:9.

This prediction likewise was amply fulfilled. The images of Nineveh were swept away, either destroyed or carried off by the conquerors. Enormous amounts of gold and silver were conveyed to Ecbatana by the victorious Medes. Very little of the precious metals have been found in the excavations of recent times. The city was spoiled of all its treasures.

6. *The captivity of the inhabitants and their removal to distant provinces were announced*, 2, 7; 3:18.

7. *The place was depopulated and the proud city sank into a mass of ruins and rubbish. It was to disappear and become a perpetual desolation*, 1:14; 3:19.

For centuries its site has been an arid waste of yellow sand. Every trace of its existence disappeared for ages. Two hundred years after its capture Xenophon, in the retreat of the ten thousand, passed near it, saw the ruins, but knew not what they were, and did not so much as learn the name of Nineveh. Even “garrulous Herodotus,” who visited the spot, had no more to say of it than this: “The Tigris was the river upon which Nineveh formerly stood.” For centuries the only sound heard in its vicinity was the lonely cry of the jackal, and hoarse growl of the hyena. God had said by the mouth of His servant the prophet, “**I will make thy grave.**” He did.

Wide and deep He did dig it; low and deep He buried Nineveh, never more to rise again, save to be gazed at with curious eyes amid dim torchlight by the archaeologist, whose pick and spade have confirmed the Lord’s predictions.

~ end of chapter 36 ~

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