



Nahum

Transcript

Introduction

00:00-01:01

The book of the prophet Nahum. This short prophetic book is a collection of poems announcing the downfall of one of Israel’s worst oppressors, the ancient empire of Assyria, and its capital city, Nineveh. The Assyrians arose as one of the world’s first great empires, and their expansion into Israel resulted in the total destruction and exile of the northern kingdom and its tribes. The Assyrian armies were violent and destructive on a scale that the world had never seen before. And so Israel and its neighbors were awaiting the downfall of Assyria, which eventually came in the year 612 B.C. The Babylonians rose up and began a rebellion that overtook Nineveh and brought down the Assyrian empire.

And so chapter 2 depicts the fall of Nineveh in vivid poetry, and chapter 3 then explores the downfall of the empire as a whole. But this book isn’t just an angry tirade against Israel’s enemies. The introductory chapters show us there is way, way more going on here.

Chapter 1

01:02-02:58

The book opens with an incomplete alphabet poem that began by describing a powerful appearance of God’s glory. It’s very similar to how the previous book, Micah, began and how the next book, Habakkuk, is going to conclude. And it’s God—the all-powerful creator—coming to confront the nations and bring his justice on their evil. And the poem opens by quoting from the famous line of God’s self-description after the golden calf incident in the book of Exodus chapter 34, “The Lord is slow to anger, he’s great in power, he won’t leave evil unpunished.” And so the rest of the poem goes back and forth contrasting the fate of the arrogant,

violent nations with the fate of God's faithful remnant. When God brings down all the arrogant empires, he will provide refuge for those who humble themselves before him.

Now, here's what's really interesting, is that you thought this book was only about Assyria, but Nahum actually nowhere mentions Nineveh or Assyria in chapter 1. And when he describes the downfall of the bad guys, he uses Isaiah's language about the fall of Babylon, which happened much later in history. And not only that, Nahum also describes the downfall of the bad guys as good news for the remnant of God's people. It's a direct allusion to Isaiah's good news about the downfall of Babylon.

And so all these little details from chapter 1, they come together to make a key point. For Nahum, the fall of Nineveh is being presented as an example, as an image, of how God is at work in history in every age, how he won't allow the arrogant or violent empires of our world to endure forever. And so the message of Nahum is actually very similar to that of Daniel. Assyria stands in a long line of violent empires throughout history. And Nineveh's fate is a memorial to God's commitment to bring down the violent and the arrogant in every age. With this perspective from the opening chapter, the book then returns to its focus on Assyria.

Chapters 2-3

02:58-03:57

And so chapter 2 describes the battle of Nineveh and the overthrow of the city in progressive stages. So first, we see the front line of Babylonian soldiers, and then we read about the charge of the chariots, and then the chaos on the city walls as the city is breached, then the slaughter of Nineveh's people, then the plundering of the city.

Chapter 3 goes on to describe the results of the city's downfall for the empire as a whole. So Nahum begins by announcing a woe upon the city whose kings built it with the blood of the innocent. It's an image of how injustice was built into the very system that made Assyria so successful. But their violence has sown the seeds of their own destruction, and so Assyria will fall before Babylon.

The book concludes with a taunt against the fallen king of Assyria. He's stricken with a fatal wound, and from among all the nations that he once oppressed, no one comes to help him. Rather, they sing and celebrate his destruction. And that's how the book ends.

Conclusion

03:58-05:05

Now this is a gloomy book, but it's important to see how Nahum's message addresses the tragic and perpetual cycles of human violence and oppression in every age. Human history is filled with tribes and nations elevating themselves and using violence to take what they want, resulting in the death of the innocent. And the book of Nahum uses Assyria and Babylon as examples to tell us that God is grieved and that he cares about the death of the innocent, and that his goodness and his justice compel him to orchestrate the downfall of oppressive nations. And God's judgment on evil is good news—unless of course you happen to be Assyria.

Which brings us all the way back to the conclusion of that opening poem in chapter 1, which tells us that "The Lord is good and a refuge in the day of distress. He cares for those who take refuge in him." And so the little book of Nahum invites every reader to humble themselves before God's justice and to trust that, in his time, he will bring down the oppressors of every time and place. And that's what the book of Nahum is all about.