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[NAHUM]

The name Nahum (Heb. נָחֹם) derives from the Hebrew root נָחֹם, ("to comfort, console, or be soled"); "to be sorry") and thus carries the general sense of "comfort" or "comforted." Other biblical names based on the same root include Menahem (2 Kgs 15:14) and Nehemiah (Neh 7:7), and some read the name Nahum as perhaps a shortened form of the latter theophoric name ("God comforts or has
comforted"; references in Roberts 1991, p. 41). Scholars are divided over whether the prophet’s name has any intentional significance for the message of the book as a whole (compare Cathcart Nahum in the Light, pp. 37–38; Sprock 1997, p. 31).

In the Jewish (Hebrew) canon, Nahum is the seventh book among those shorter prophetic books (Hosea through Malachi) grouped together in our earliest manuscripts and known collectively as "The (Book of the) Twelve," or the “Minor Prophets” in Christian tradition. These books (along with Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel) are counted among the Latter Prophets in the Nevi'im, the second subdivision of the tripartite Jewish canon. In Christian tradition (following the Septuagint [LXX]), the Twelve are located at the end of the Old Testament canon. Despite variations in the sequence of the twelve in the LXX (especially in the placement of Joel), the order of the last six books, beginning with Nahum, is stable. Scholarship over the past few decades has focused especially on the redaction of the Twelve as a coherent literary unit, possessing its own identifiable themes and structure (see Redditt and Schart 2003). Moreover, since we have no evidence for Nahum’s earlier existence as a separate or independent work, the prophetic book has been increasingly interpreted within the wider literary context of the Twelve (see, e.g., Nogalski 1993b "Nahum"; House 1996).

**Authorship.** The personal name Nahum occurs only here in the Hebrew Bible, although it is attested elsewhere in ancient Israelite and Jewish inscriptions (Roberts, p. 41). Despite later traditions, the location of the prophet’s town of origin, Elkosh, is unknown (it has been variously placed by scholars in Judah, Israel, or even Mesopotamia). Some have argued that both names, Nahum and Elkosh, are more literary than historical, with symbolic meanings linked to the overall themes of the book (Sprock 1997, pp. 32–33). Unlike some other prophetic books, Nahum lacks a call narrative or any biographical material that would provide information on the prophet named in the superscription of 1:1. Consequently, scholars speculate concerning the writer’s social location and historical setting based on the assumed genre of the book and internal clues found therein. Many have proposed that the author was some type of "cultic prophet," whose oracles reflect liturgical usage (Haldar 1947; Blenkinsopp 1996, pp. 123–24; contrast Renaud 1987, p. 199; and Floyd 2000, pp. 11–12). Other proposals include a scribe, or someone with scribal connections and knowledge of Mesopotamian literature (Sprock, 1997, pp. 6–7, 25; Floyd 2000, p. 33; see further below), or a northern Israelite exile writing to comfort Judeans in the face of Assyrian oppression (van der Woude 1977, p. 124). Still others argue that scholarly debate should focus less on any particular historical figure and more on the book itself. Christensen, for example, views Nahum as a highly sophisticated "numerical and musical composition" within the Book of the Twelve, largely the product of a Persian period redactor. Consequently, we "know next to nothing" about the historical prophet of the seventh century and "his presumed literary work is beyond recovery" (2009, pp. 56–57).

**Contents and Structure.** The overarching theme of the book is the imminent divine judgment and destruction of the city of Nineveh, the royal capital of the Neo-Assyrian empire, which fell to a coalition of Babylonians and Medes in 612 B.C.E. Following an initial theophanic hymn that emphasizes God as the avenging, divine warrior, the remaining chapters constitute a series of oracles or taunt songs directed against Nineveh and the Assyrian king, which together depict in vivid poetic fashion the siege and destruction of the city and the downfall of the once mighty king.

Proposed structural analyses for Nahum vary widely, depending on one’s view of the book’s genre and primary message. Some scholars discern two main sections, others three, others four or more (see the survey in Christensen, pp. 41–42). The outline below does not resolve this issue, but provides an overview for the discussion that follows.

I. Superscription: 1:1
II. Divine Wrath and Judgment against Assyria: 1:2–15
   [Heb. 1:2–21]
   a. Theophanic hymn: The wrathful God will avenge his enemies: 1:2–8
b. Destruction for those who oppose God: 1:9–10
c. Oppression of Judah will end, Assyria’s destruction is at hand: 1:11–15 [Heb. 1:11–2:1]

III. Oracle against Nineveh and the King of Assyria: 2:1–13 [Heb. 2:2–14]
a. Vivid depiction of battle and the city’s destruction: 2:1, 3–9 [Heb. 2:2, 4–10]
b. The once mighty, devouring lion will prey no more: 2:10–13 [Heb. 2:11–14]

IV. Woe oracle against Nineveh: 3:1–17
a. The bloody city, personified as a shamed, ravaged prostitute: 3:1–7
b. Nineveh suffers the same fate as Egyptian Thebes: 3:8–11
c. The city has no defense in the face of attack: 3:12–17

V. The Fate of the Assyrian King: 3:18–19
a. The king’s city is abandoned, his “wound” is incurable
b. Rejoicing among the countless victims of Assyrian oppression

Date. Despite its brevity—three chapters totaling less than fifty verses—the book of Nahum has occasioned a great deal of discussion and debate among biblical theologians and historians, with only a modicum of consensus regarding key literary and historical issues. Scholars who view the book as a literary unity have by and large argued for a date somewhere in the seventh century B.C.E., during a period demarcated by two points of historical reference in the book: the Assyrian sack of Thebes in 667 B.C.E. (treated as a past event in Nah 3:8–9), and the fall of the Assyrian capital Nineveh in 612 B.C.E. (see Nah 1:1, 2:8 [Heb. 2:9], 3:7, plus the mention of the king of Assyria in 3:18). For some, the reference to Thebes can only be effective if the book was written not long after the event (e.g., Roberts, p. 38; Spronk 1997, p. 13). Other proposals for an historical setting include periods of outright revolt (ca. 650 B.C.E.), heightened anti-Assyrian sentiment (under the Judean king Manasseh), or Assyrian loss of control in the closing decades of the seventh century following the death of Ashurbanipal ca. 627 B.C.E. Still others date Nahum’s oracles to 612 B.C.E., immediately before the fall of Nineveh, when that city’s demise would have been inevitable to the careful political observer (contrast Maier 1959, pp. 27–30). For those not wedded to the notion of predictive prophecy (compare Maier’s appeal to “divine revelation,” [p. 108]), the book best fits the period during or shortly after the fall of Nineveh, with the author as a possible eyewitness to the event, or at least possessing specific knowledge of the city’s apparent watery destruction (Machinist 1997; Huddleston 2003, citing references to water in 2:6–8 [Heb. 2:7–9]). In the latter case, the biblical book would then constitute an independent witness, alongside the meager Assyrian and later Greek sources, for the city’s demise via intentional flooding (see the survey in Machinist 1997). Lastly, others posit a long redactional process behind the book, which took final shape as late as the postexilic period (see below). Earlier attempts to date Nahum (or portions of it) to the early Maccabean period (ca. 160s B.C.E.; Haupt 1907, pp. 1–2) have proven untenable. The discovery of the fragmentary commentary (pesher) on the text of Nahum among the Dead Sea Scrolls from Qumran dates to the first half of the first century B.C.E. (Berrin 2004; Douma 2001). An assumed Maccabean date for Nahum makes it highly unlikely that the book could have achieved canonical status so quickly. Moreover, Nahum’s oracles concerning the destruction of Nineveh are mentioned in the apocryphal book of Tobit (14:4, following the G1 text; the passage is absent in the fragmentary Hebrew/Aramaic texts of Tobit from Qumran, Moore 1996, pp. 287, 290, 34–36). Most scholars date Tobit to the third or early second century B.C.E., before the Maccabean period (Moore, pp. 40–42). Tobit’s emphasis on the authority of “the words spoken by all the prophets of Israel” may indicate some type of canonical status for Nahum by this period (first century B.C.E.; Berrin).

Literary Issues. Scholars debate whether the whole book can or should be attributed to one author. For some, Nahum is the product of an extended redactional process that originated with a core set of oracles from the seventh century, which then accrued multiple layers of alterations and additions with final redaction during the period of the
Babylonian exile and later (Seybold 1989; Jeremias 1970; Fabry 2006, pp. 87–94). This approach to the book isolates the origins and literary history of individual units, with editorial reshaping in later periods to address then-current political or social situations (e.g., "Nineveh" as a cipher or symbol for Babylon). Examples of this type of redaction-critical analysis view the opening hymn in 1:2–8 and the transitional material that follows it (1:9–2:2 [Heb. 23]) as later additions, with portions of chapters 2 to 3 forming the original oracles against Nineveh (Jeremias, Seybold, Nogalski 1993a). Others reject this approach and focus instead on the assumed intentionally coherent and elaborate literary structure of the book as a whole, which is invoked as evidence of compositional unity. Such proposed structures focus on key words, themes, intricate chiastic patterns and concentric structures covering small or large portions of the text, line and word acrostics, and other overall structuring devices (illustrated in the commentaries of Spronk, Christensen). Such analysis is most evident in the history of scholarship on the literary structure, compositional history, and extent of the theophanic psalm that opens the book (1:2–8) and its relationship to the chapters that follow. For well over a century, scholars have debated whether the psalm is an acrostic, given the fact that its alphabetic structure ends abruptly with verse 8, only halfway through the Hebrew alphabet. Many have attempted to reconstruct the original version of the hymn (e.g., extending it into the verses that follow), arguing that an original acrostic has been adapted or "bent" to suit the author's purpose, or that the abrupt ending is a literary device intended to emphasize the disruption of order via divine intervention. In response, others have countered that the idea of a partial or semi-acrostic hymn is problematic (not attested elsewhere in the biblical corpus) and should be abandoned (see the summary of positions in Weigl 2001, pp. 83–87; for contrasting views, compare Floyd 1994 and Baumann 2005, pp. 52–60 with Spronk 1998 and Renz 2009).

**Genre.** As with compositional history and date, there is little consensus on the genre of the book. Many over the past century interpreted the alternating shifts in direct address in gender and number (detailed in Lanner 2006, pp. 80–85) as evidence of multiple voices in a prophetic liturgy (Haldar, Humbert 1932), although this has not gone unchallenged (e.g., Rudolph 1975, pp. 144–45; analysis in Floyd 2000, pp. 11–12). Others have drawn on specific prophetic forms, for example, Nahum as a unique type of "prophetic refutation speech" to refute those who challenge God’s power to act in the face of Assyrian aggression (Sweeney 1992), or a "prophetic historical exemplum" (Floyd 2000) that draws on God’s actions in the past as example for the present (combining elements of direct address, narration, and interpretation of past events). Aside from prophetic genres, others have viewed the book as a propagandistic anti-Assyrian tract or letter to foment opposition to Assyrian aggression, or a type of non-violent resistance literature similar to modern protest poetry (Wessels 1998; analysis in O’Brien 2009, pp. 110–115). Other genre proposals have included identifying the oracles in chapters 2 to 3 as originally soldiers’ songs glowing over enemy defeat that were later adapted for a religious context (Seybold), or reading the book as a type of city lament, a literary genre known in Mesopotamian literature (Dobbs-Allsopp 1993).

**Nahum as Poet.** One area of unanimity among scholars has been their unrestrained praise of the poetic talents of the author (e.g., Smith 1911, pp. 273–274). For example, in 2:1 [Heb. 2:2] and 3:14, the reader is dramatically drawn into the heat of battle through a series of terse military commands to prepare the city for siege. Elsewhere the oracles display a host of literary devices, including: alliteration (e.g., bēqaqūm bōqēqūm, "devastators have devastated them" in 2:2 [Heb. 23]; būqā ʿanēbūqā ʿāmēbūlāqā, "desolation, devastation, and destruction!" in 2:10 [Heb. 2:11]); metaphor (Nineveh personified as a ravaged prostitute in 3:4; Assyria as a predatory lion in 2:11–13 [Heb. 2:12–14]); simile (3:12); rhetorical questions (1:6, 9, 11; 3:8, 19); and repetition (Heb. gam "also" is used repeatedly in 3:10–11 to emphasize that Nineveh will suffer the same fate as Thebes). In addition to the assumed partial acrostic in 1:2–8, some have argued for the existence of name-acrostics in the
book, that is, lines where the first letters of each word or line combine to form a new word (e.g., the name "Assyria" in 1:12a or "Nineveh" in 3:18), although the plausibility of these and other acrostics in Nahum as intentional poetic devices is not beyond doubt.

Nahum in Its Wider Literary Context. As part of the Book of the Twelve, scholars have isolated and discussed the many areas of intersection between Nahum and the books that precede and follow it—intersections, evident, for example, in superscriptions, catchwords, quotations, repetition of themes, allusions, and framing devices (see Redditt and Schart; House). Nogalski (1993b) in particular has argued that the final redaction of chapter 1 added over a dozen "catchwords" designed to link that chapter to Micah 7 immediately preceding it, and, moreover, that the overall structure of Nahum fits "a structural pattern beginning in Micah and extending through Habbakuk" (p. 202), while Christensen discerns an overall coherent structure in reading Nahum and Habbakuk together as one unit (p. 4). Scholars have also long noted the connections between Nahum and Jonah. Both concern Nineveh and its wickedness, yet their outcomes differ markedly, with Nineveh forgiven and spared in Jonah, but brutally destroyed in Nahum. Both also draw upon the traditional list of God's attributes in Exodus 34:6–7. While Jonah 4:2 emphasizes God's forgiving attributes (gracious, merciful, slow to anger, steadfast love, ready to relent) in line with the larger theme of the book, Nahum 1:2–3 does precisely the opposite in eliminating or selectively altering all but one of the positive attributes (remitting only "slow to anger"). Nahum's selective list accentuates divine wrath, focusing on Nineveh/Assyria, which is now the guilty party that God will by no means acquit.

Outside of the Twelve, some passages in Nahum find parallels in other prophetic books, most notably the messenger motif in Isaiah 52:7 and Nahum 1:15 (Heb. 21), although scholars are divided over the direction of the literary relationship. Some view Nahum as the source for Isaiah here (Rudolph, p. 163; Spronk 1997, pp. 79–80), while others cite this parallel as evidence that the author, writing in a later period, drew on earlier prophetic traditions (Renaud, pp. 205; Nogalski 1993a, pp. 96–98). Moving beyond the biblical corpus, scholars have identified areas of possible influence in Nahum, including the frequent use of treaty-curse language common in Mesopotamian and Canaanite tradition (Cathcart "Treaty-Curses"), the use of lion imagery in 2:11–13 [Heb. 212–14] (often associated with Assyria; see Machinist 1983, pp. 735–736, but contrast Cogan 2008), reference to the Mesopotamian goddess Ishtar and her association with the Assyrian king and Nineveh (for example, Pinker 2005 and Lanner, pp. 129–135, both on Nahum 2:8), and a probable knowledge of the topographical situation of Nineveh, which may have influenced the writer's description of Thebes in 38:9 (Huddleston).

Interpretation. The interpretation of Nahum over the past century has focused mainly on two interrelated issues: the form and date of the opening hymn (discussed above) and its place in the perceived literary unity of the book; and the problem of divine violence in Nahum. For those who discern some type of conceptual or theological unity, the opening hymn (1:2–8), despite its theological focus, should not be viewed as out of character with the "profane" oracles that follow. Rather, the hymn's emphasis on divine wrath and vengeance, on the God who does not clear the guilty, serves as the necessary prologue to, and justification for, God's violent judgment against wicked Nineveh/Assyria in subsequent chapters. Yet despite attempts to portray God's wrath as not arbitrary, but consonant with his covenant relationship with his people, modern interpreters have struggled with the negative tone and celebration of excessive violence in Nahum, particularly when compared to other so-called ethical prophets such as Isaiah or Jeremiah (but see essays in Franke and O'Brien 2010). The author's passionate nationalism and gleeful mockery over the bloody defeat and plundering of Nineveh and the slaughter of its inhabitants (e.g., 3:1–3, including the implied violent murder of infants) was, for some interpreters, "representative of the old, narrow and shallow prophecy" of the type associated with the false prophets such as Hananiah in Jeremiah 28.
(so Smith, 281; see O'Brien, pp. 103–105 for a survey of similar negative assessments). This perspective was frequently contrasted by such commentators with later Christian ethical ideals. While some simply rejected the author as a prophet (bad prophet, good poet), others have sought to defend the book’s unbridled gloating over Nineveh’s fall as justified by the brutality of a tyrannical Assyrian regime, as the rightful response of an oppressed, or even traumatized, Judah (for trauma as a rationale for “vengeance fantasy” in Nahum, see Garber 2008). Still others maintain that the central point of the book is not about human violence against Assyria or avenging Judah, but about divine sovereignty and justice: the righteous indignation of God demands action in the face of evil, here symbolized by Nineveh. This reading wholly embraces the language of a vengeful, divine warrior in the opening chapter as not only consistent with the chapters that follow, but also as an important clue to the interpretation of the final form of the book: Becking (1995), for example, argues that “provoked divine wrath” is the unfolding and unifying theological concept in the book. Others as well consider the hymn as “key” to understanding the book (e.g., Spronk 1997, p. 15, and Christensen, p. 209, both citing Achtemeier 1986, who is at pains to provide a theological justification for the negative depiction of God in the opening verses, see pp. 5–6, 8–9).

Other interpreters, however, refuse to accept any reading that would condone such violence (murder, pillaging, rape, etc.) against innocent people (whether Judean or Assyrian) under any circumstances. This criticism of violence in Nahum has emerged most pointedly in feminist and postmodernist readings of the book. Drawing on a host of approaches, including feminist, ideological, rhetorical, and deconstructionist readings, O’Brien argues that “the problem of violence in Nahum is not only a problem of its explicit violence but also a problem of its ideological frameworks that undergird mentality of violence” (p. 122). For her, such ideological frameworks encompass and condone sexism and extreme brutality (e.g., Nineveh personified as a prostitute who is shamed and raped as just punishment). Both are made acceptable in the book via the process of othering, that is, by portraying “the Assyrians as faceless, monolithic ‘Others’.” Similarly, the bodies of innocent women and children in Nineveh’s streets are “mere ciphers for ‘oppressors’ or ‘evil’ or ‘enemies of God’” (pp. 121–122). For the author, one must reject the rhetoric of “othering,” while at the same time acknowledging the legitimacy of the oppressed to resist the oppressor. Ultimately, O’Brien attempts to strike a delicate (and difficult) balance (pp. 127–128) between a sovereign God’s right to take vengeance against the oppressor of his people and the way in which that act of vengeance itself imitates the oppressor in view of the suffering and loss of innocent life that ensues.

The interpretive gap between the above readings of Nahum derives more from varying approaches to the biblical text than any particular feature of the book itself. The tacit acceptance of God’s vengeful actions as justified despite innocent suffering reflects a theological hermeneutic that operates within the ideological world of the book itself. In contrast, O’Brien brings to the interpretive table a perspective that reads against the assumptions of the text, that refuses to allow the marginalization of innocent victims. Achtemeier’s assertion (pp. 5–6), that interpreters in their misguided emphasis on human concepts of morality have failed “to let Nahum be a book about God,” deflects attention away from the very issue that most troubles O’Brien.

While the debate regarding Nahum has turned historically on Judah’s divinely avenged suffering at the hands of the Neo-Assyrian regime, the problem of divine (or divinely sanctioned) violence is not unique to this book (see, for example, essays in Franke and O’Brien). In its graphic depiction of war, Nahum draws not only on inner biblical literary themes (compare similar references to the brutal murder of infants and their mothers in Hos 10:14 and 13:16, Isa 13:16, and Ps 137:9; the latter invokes divine vengeance against Babylon), but also from well-attested battle rhetoric in the wider ancient Near East (for example, with heaps of corpses in Nah 3:3; see Richardson 2007 for Mesopotamian military inscriptions). The practice of “othering”
(pace O’Brien) as a means of bracketing and dehumanizing the victims of war in service to a dominant ideology transcends the case of Judah and its ancestral god and, one might argue, is not confined to the biblical world or time. In the end, the conclusions of the modern reader of Nahum in this debate will depend largely on the particular stance that she or he chooses to adopt vis-à-vis the book itself and the religious tradition(s) to which it belongs.

**Reception History.** Aside from scattered quotations or allusions in Jewish and early Christian texts (Josephus’s *Ant.* 9.11.3, quoting Nah 2:8–13; the book of Tobit; and possible allusions in the New Testament book of Revelation—Rev 17:2,5,16 and 18:23 with Nah 3:14; and Rev 6:12,17 with Nah 15:5–6), the book of Nahum occupies a significant place among the Dead Sea Scrolls. While quoted or alluded to in several of the Qumran sect’s preserved non-biblical writings (e.g., Vermes 2004), the book is treated fully in the fragmentary commentary on it, which serves as a vehicle for the Qumran author to identify and condemn the sect’s enemies, both Jew and gentile. For example, the fearsome lion of Nahum 2:11–12 (symbolic of the Assyrian empire) is identified as “the furious young lion who strikes by means of his great men, and by means of the men of his council” (Vermes, p. 505). Most scholars consider the leonine epithet a reference to the Maccabean ruler Alexander Janneus (reigned 103–76 BCE; Berrin, pp. 104–107; contrast Doudna, pp. 557–573). Elsewhere the “city of blood, full of lies...” of Nahum 3:1 (referring to Nineveh) is identified by the sect as “the city of Ephraim, those who seek smooth things during the last days” (here understood by most scholars as a reference to the Pharisees; Berrin, pp. 91–99, 112–118; Baumgarten, “Seekers after Smooth Things” in *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, vol. 2, pp. 857–859). While nearly all groups or rulers are referred to in indirect fashion via epithets in the scrolls (Pharisees, Sadducees, Maccabean rulers, etc.), the Nahum pesher is rare for its explicit mention (Frgs. 3–4, Col. 1, line 2 on Nah 2:11) of two historical figures (“[Demetrius king of Greece,” identified by most scholars as the Seleucid king Demetrius III Eukairos, reigned 95–88 BCE] and “Antiochus” (the Ptolemaic ruler, either Antiochus III [223–187] or IV [175–164]; Berrin, pp. 89–91, 100; *Oxford Encyclopedia*, vol.1, p. 189). As such, the commentary provides valuable historical information on the events of the Maccabean period, as well as the development of Jewish sectarianism in the closing decades prior to the emergence of Christianity (generally Schiffman 2010, with detailed textual analysis in Doudna 2001 and Berrin).

Aside from scattered, disparate references to Nahum in rabbinic tradition, discussion of the book focuses on two issues in particular: God’s wrath and vengeance in the opening chapter, and the problem of repentance vis-à-vis the book of Jonah. In the first case, rabbinic interpreters seek to justify God’s wrath and vengeance in Nahum 1:2, 6 (in contrast to Lev 19:38 and Isa 27:4) by arguing that these attributes are reserved for his or Israel’s enemies, and that, moreover, God, unlike humans, is able to master his anger (e.g., b. *Abod. Zarah*, 4a and *Gen. Rab.* 49:9 and 55:3; for the texts, see Neusner 2007, pp. 95–96, 113–114). In the second, the positive rabbinic emphasis on repentance in Jonah leads to the problem of reconciling Nahum’s oracles against Nineveh with that city’s previous repentance (reading the books in canonical sequence). In the Aramaic translation of the book, the problem is addressed through the insertion of additional material in the first verse, stating how Nineveh had indeed repented under Jonah, but now had sinned again and was being punished anew (Cathcart and Gordon 1989, p. 131). This interpretation is attested in later Jewish, as well as Christian, commentary tradition (Rashi on Nah 1:1; see Luther’s preface to the book in Oswald 1975, 281; discussion in Ego 2003, who cites other rabbinic texts that argue the repentance was not genuine).

In Christian tradition, the church fathers and later commentators also applied portions of the book to current peoples and events. Here Nahum served both as a source of final eschatological judgment (with Nineveh as a symbol of the sinful world to be judged) and comfort for those persecuted (like Judah, the church would be delivered). In addition, the book afforded an opportunity via a spiritual or mystical reading for explicit messianic
or christological interpretation, foretelling events in the life of Jesus or the early church. For example, in his commentary on Nahum, the seventh-century author (Pseudo-) Julian of Toledo asserted that reading the book in its "mystical sense" points to "the restoration of the human race through Christ" (Latin text and translation in Ball 1999, p. 212). Two centuries later, the widely read Haimo of Auxerre asserted that the fate of Nineveh (symbolic of the world) in Nahum (ch. 2) referred to divine "judgment on the devil and his associates" (Latin text in Ball, p. 214), while Nahum 1:15 ("Keep your feasts, O Judah") referred (in its mystical sense) to the church, "which the devil was oppressing with the crushing yoke of idolatry, that when set free by the Lord's passion it should celebrate its festivals" (Ball, p. 214). Earlier this same passage (1:15) is cited by the fourth-century Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, in his sixth Festal Letter (dated 334 C.E.) as divine exhortation to celebrate Easter (see Schaff and Wace 1903/1978, p. 519). In a more explicit messianic or christological reading, the early church father and celebrated apologist, Tertullian (ca. 155–240 C.E.) cites Nahum 1:4 ("He rebukes the sea...") as a prediction of Jesus calming the waves as he walks on water (in his work Against Marcion; IV.20; Evans 1972, p. 365).

Other commentators, to varying degrees, were aware of the historical context of the book (despite frequent confusion over dates and rulers), but quickly moved beyond this to engage in theological polemic. In his commentary on the Minor Prophets, Cyril (Patriarch of Alexandria, ca. 375–444), acknowledges the historical setting of Nahum, but then also interprets passages with reference to "the Jews" regarding their disobedience and rejection of Jesus. While Nahum 1:2–3 speaks of God's wrath and vengeance on the enemies of Israel, according to Cyril, it applies also to the ungodly and "is no less relevant, however, also to the leaders of the Jews—I mean scribes and Pharisees—who rejected faith in Christ." For this, God "still will certainly not absolve the guilty who have warred against the true faith" (Hill 2008, p. 286, also 296). Similarly, the "bonds" of Judah in Nahum 1:13 also refer to the Jews at the time of Jesus, who were in the "grip of the folly and antipathy of the scribes and Pharisees, and were held fast by their commandments...and so did not accept the faith" (Hill, p. 298). The breaking of the bonds, according to Cyril, came about with their coming to Christ (ibid.). Cyril frequently compares the sinful Nineveh to Jerusalem (symbolic, for him, of the Jews or scribes and Pharisees), citing its role in the death of Christ (for example, Nahum 3:19 on the incurable wound of Nineveh: "this happened to Jerusalem for killing the Lord," p. 397).

Similar current applications can be found in the Nahum commentary of the sixteenth century German reformer, Martin Luther (Oswald; the Altenburg Text). While he predictably views the central purpose of the book as promoting throughout the "doctrine of faith," namely, that Judah should retain its faith in God's promises of deliverance and that the kingdom would endure until the coming of Christ (Oswald, p. 282), the often outspoken reformer does not hesitate to draw parallels from Nahum regarding current political leadership and the papacy. For example, commenting on Nahum 1:3 ("God will by no means clear the guilty"), Luther adds, "Even today this is our comfort against the mad bishops and princes" (p. 286), and on the flood in Nahum 1:8 (here interpreted as the rush of evil that will ultimately subside): "we shall experience it again in the case of our wicked princes, who along with the pope have raged against the Gospel of God" (p. 289; compare 291, 308–309). Ultimately, for the reformer, just as the Assyrian, Persian, and Greek kingdoms came to an end due to their abuse of power and wickedness, so too is "the pope being destroyed by the Word of God" (p. 281). Unlike other Christian commentators before him, Luther shows restraint in reading the book through a messianic lens; only Nahum 1:15 (quoted in Isa 52:7 and also by Paul in the New Testament book of Romans, 10:15) can rightly, he argues, be related to Christ.

[See also Habakkuk; Jonah; and Micah.]

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Ball, Edward. "When the Towers Fall: Interpreting Nahum as Christian Scripture." In In Search of True


Christensen, Duane L. Nahum. Anchor Yale Bible 24F. New Haven, Conn., and London: Yale University Press, 2009. Recent full length commentary in English. Author takes a thoroughgoing literary approach to the book, which he describes as a “meticulously contrived numerical and musical masterpiece” (p. 57), edited during the exile period or later as part of the Book of the Twelve (we have no knowledge of the prophet or the book prior to this period). Much of the commentary is devoted to the author’s “logoprosodic analysis” of the Hebrew text, along with the application of key concepts from “archaeomusicology.” Both involve isolating detailed and intricate numerical and musical patterns and devices. While the author deals with traditional philological and historical matters, these are often overshadowed by his more idiosyncratic prosodic conclusions. For these reasons, the commentary is of limited value for the informed lay reader. Contains a full bibliography of commentaries and secondary literature on Nahum, along with a useful history of scholarship.


Floyd, Michael H. “The Chimerical Acrostic of Nahum 1:2–10.” Journal of Biblical Literature 113 (1994): 421–437. A seminal article in Nahum scholarship concerning the debate over the (semi- or partial) alphabetical acrostical form of the opening chapter. Author surveys the problems associated with the assumptions behind an acrostic, including questions of definition, text-criticism, and the appeal to prosodic analysis. In each area, the case for an acrostic (partial or otherwise) is found to be wanting. He argues that 1:2–10 is neither an acrostic nor a hymn, but rather a “prophetic interrogation” intended to “provoke theological reflection” on the implications of Nineveh’s demise. (For response to this article, see Spronk 1998.)

Floyd, Michael H. Minor Prophets. Part 2. Forms of Old Testament Literature. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000. While ostensibly devoted to a form critical approach, the author’s treatment of Nahum (pp. 1–78) provides valuable, well-written and argued analyses of both literary (especially structure and genre) and historical issues in the book. Liberally cites previous scholarship.


Lanner, L. "Who Will Lament Her?" *The Feminine and the Fantastic in the Book of Nahum*. Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 434. New York and London: T. & T. Clark, 2006. Following a detailed survey of Nahum scholarship, the author devotes the remaining four chapters to a gender-based analysis of the book. Includes a translation of the text with additions to indicate shifts in address and gender. The longest chapter of the volume deals with the "presence of the feminine" in the text, that is, the feminine Other or adversary "hidden in the text," and identified as the Assyrian goddess Ishtar. Moreover, anti-feminine references may also be directed at Jews who worship the goddess. The author then draws on three modern theories of the "literary fantastic" to lend support to her conclusions regarding a goddess in the text. While not all would agree with her gender-based exegesis of selected passages, her detailed focus on gender and the supernatural throughout the whole of Nahum provides a fresh perspective on old interpretive problems.


Machinist, Peter. "The Fall of Assyria in Comparative Ancient Perspective." In *Assyria 1995: Proceedings of the 10th Anniversary Symposium of the Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project*. Helsinki, September 7–11, 1995, edited by Simo Parpola and Robert M. Whiting, pp. 179–195. Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1997. Examines the similarities and differences among the biblical/Jewish, Babylonian, and classical traditions regarding the fall of Nineveh in 612 B.C.E. (e.g., intertextuality in Nahum, the "retributive view of history" in both biblical/Jewish and Babylonian literary traditions, and the mention of water with reference to Nineveh's fall in Nahum and classical sources). The author argues that Nahum and later Greek traditions reflect a possible knowledge of the watery destruction of the city via intentional flooding, after the city had been taken. In light of this, the author dates the book to the period immediately following the events of 612.


O’Brien, Julia M. *Nahum*. 2d ed. Sheffield, U.K.: Sheffield Academic, 2009. An excellent introduction to newer literary readings of the book (rhetorical, ideological, deconstructionist, post-colonial, etc.), but which also interacts with more traditional historical critical scholarship. Especially useful chapters on Nahum and gender ("Nahum and (Wo)men") and the problem of violence ("Nahum and Atrocity").


Spronk, Klaas. *Nahum.* Historical Commentary on the Old Testament. Kampen, Netherlands: Kok Pharos, 1997. A commentary on Nahum, based on the author’s "new structural analysis," which reveals the book to be "a well-structured unity with an intricate web of crossreferences throughout the book, emphasizing the divine oracles." The author’s thoroughgoing synchronic approach surveys "all possible literary devices used by the poet" in creating a well-balanced structure consisting of three cantos, subdivided into smaller units (canticles, strophes, and verses). Takes a conservative view of the Hebrew text, accepting the Masoretic Text with only a few “slight emendations.”


Weigl, Michael. "Current Research on the Book of Nahum: Exegetical Methodologies in Turnoii?" *Currents in Research* 9 (2001): 81–130. A detailed survey of research on Nahum largely during the 1990s, although relative to ongoing issues and debates from earlier periods. Highlights the emerging synchronic approach (emphasizing literary structure, intentional poetic devices) over against the traditional historical-critical, redaction-oriented diachronic analyses. The author concludes that neither approach is wholly "self-sufficient" and that their combination would profitably encompass the fruits of both.


John R. Huddleston

**NICODEMUS, GOSPEL OF**

*See Pilate, Acts of.*

**NUMBERS**

The book of Numbers is the fourth part of the Torah (Pentateuch). In the Mishnah (Yoma VII.1; Menachot IV.3) and in the Talmud (B. Sotha 36b) it is named "Ḥomeš ha-Peqūdim" (= “The Fifth [of the