

OBADIAH & NAHUM

Bob Witte | 5 Sessions

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— OZARK CHRISTIAN COLLEGE —

Session 1: Obadiah Historical Background

Minor Prophets Introduction

- Prophets are God's spokesmen. They reveal the Word of the Lord to his people.
- Their typical message is to pronounce judgment for particular sins committed and to plea for repentance and holiness.
- There are twelve Minor Prophets at the end of our Old Testament. They are only labeled "minor" because of the length of writing. But their bold and powerful message is anything but minor.
- The Minor Prophets are some of the most ignored books in our Bible. ***Why do you think that is the case?***

Why Put Obadiah and Nahum Together?

- Both are short, little-known books that address non-Israelite nations that have sinned greatly against God's people.
- By the end of the study, you'll see God's heart to avenge his children for the evil done to them. You'll look at evil on a global scale and how God will deal with it.
- You will also see a portrait of the Messiah, whom we can lean into as we experience personal hardship because of the wickedness around us.
- ***What do you hope to gain from studying the Obadiah and Nahum?***

Obadiah Introduction

- Shortest book: one chapter, 21 verses
- Written entirely toward the nation of Edom
- The key theme is judgment of Edom, Israel's bother

Authorship and Dating

- Obadiah's name means "servant of the Lord" or "one who worships the Lord."
- Little is known about this prophet and the time of his writing. There are two leading theories about the dating.
 1. Early Date in 853-841 BC
 - a. Time of King Jehoram (2 Kgs 8:20-22; 2 Chr 21:8-15); Edom rebelled against Judah during this timeframe.
 - b. Possibly the same Obadiah who was Ahab's palace administrator. He was hiding prophets from Jezebel just before Ahab's showdown with Elijah on Mount Carmel. (1 Kgs 18:3-14)
 2. Exilic in 605-586 BC
 - a. The Nabatean Arabs displaced the Edomites from Mount Seir in 521-485 BC.
 - b. The Edomites settled in the Negev (desert region in southern Judah) and attacked Jerusalem after Nebuchadnezzar destroyed it. (Ps 137:7; Eze 25:12-14)
 - c. There is a notable parallel between vv. 1-6 and Jeremiah 49:9-10, 14-16. This indicates that either one prophet borrowed from another, or

they had a common source, or they were writing during the same time period.

- Ultimately the date is unknown. Bob leans towards the later date for the writing of Obadiah for three main reasons:
 1. It fits the culmination of Judah's invasion of Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians.
 2. It fits the idea of the Israelites longing for God's vengeance against their enemies.
 3. It fits the idea that both Obadiah and Jeremiah are writing the same thing within the same context.
- ***What do you think? Why is it important to know?***
- ***Look at the introduction of any Study Bible. What does it say about the matter?***

Historical Context

What happened? Why is there so much bad blood between Edom and Israel?

- The strife starts with the twin brother Esau and Jacob in their mother's womb. (Gen 25:19-26) There was a prophecy connected to these brothers that the older would submit to the younger.
- As they grew up, Jacob deceived his brother and Esau despised his birthright and family inheritance. (Gen 25:27-34)
- Jacob becomes the nation of Israel, while Esau travels southeast and becomes the powerful nation known as Edom.

The more these two nations increased, so did the strife between them.

- God gave the Edomites the hill country of Seir, south of the Promise Land, as an inheritance. They denied Israel passage through their land while wandering in the wilderness. (Num 20:14-21)
- David became famous after he and Abishai slaughtered 18,000 Edomites in the Valley of Salt. (2 Sam 8:13-14; 1 Chron 18:12)
- Hadad the Edomite rose up as an adversary against Solomon. (1 King 11:14-16)
- Jehoash defeated 10,000 Edomites in the Valley of Salt. (2 King 14:7)
- There are almost 100 Old Testament references to the Edomites. Nearly all of them are condemning because of their lack of faith in God and brutality towards their brothers, the Israelites.
- Look up a few of these texts that address the Edomites. Gen 27:41-45; 32:1-21,33,36; Ex 15:15; Num 24:18; Deut 2:1-8; 23:7-8; 1 Sam 14:47; 1 Sam 22; 2 King 8:20-22; Psalm 60; 83; 137:7; Isa 34:5,9,11; Ezek 25:12-14; 35; Joel 3:18-19; Amos 1:11-12; 9:11-12

The Edomites After Obadiah

After Obadiah's prophetic words, the Edomites were wiped from the face of the earth because of their wickedness.

- Edom's location was a wasteland in Malachi 1:2, which is dated approximately 433 BC.

- Judas Maccabaeus subdued and greatly weakened the Edomites during the intertestamental period. (1 Macc 5:65)
- When Greek became the common language, the Edomites were called Idumaeans. Josephus references Herod the Great as an Idumaeen. (cf. MK 3:8) They eventually vanished from history books and genealogies.
- Even though Edom was a constant thorn in Israel's flesh, the prophecy about Jacob and Esau ultimately held true: "The older will submit to the younger."

Conclusion

- ***Why do you think it is important to dig into the history and background of Obadiah before just jumping into the book?***
- We are about to take a deep look at the difficult subject of God's vengeance. Without the proper historical context, it seems like God is quick to vent his wrath rather than a righteous liberator.
- Read Obadiah 15. ***Why is this such a key verse?***
- Rest assured, we can always trust in God's promises. He promises to judge those who dedicate their lives to violence and injustice in order to bring relief, rest, and joy to the oppressed.

Session 2: Obadiah's Message to the Edomites

Obadiah 1-2

"The vision of Obadiah. This is what the Sovereign Lord says about Edom."

- Visions are common in the prophets, referring to spoken, visual, and written revelation from God. Obadiah does not give the specific details of how he received this vision.
- Obadiah also uses the traditional prophetic messenger statement, "This is what the Sovereign Lord says about Edom."
- Both statements affirm the message is from God, not man, and provides a warning to Edom.
- ***How do you determine if a message is from the Lord or not?***

Obadiah 2

Verse 2 says that God has sent an ambassador envoy to the nations to rise up against the powerful nation of Edom.

- This envoy could be the prophets.
- It could be an angelic delegation.
- It could be divine prompting for other nations to advance upon Edom.

No matter how the message was sent, it is clear. God says he will make the mighty Edomites small among the nations. This literally means he will cut them down to size.

In what ways do you see God working within various nations in modern history or in our current times?

Obadiah 3-9

God dismantles all the boasts of the Edomites. Their arrogance has deceived them into thinking they are secure. ***What are some details of each of these false securities of the Edomites?***

1. Location (3-4):
2. Wealth (5-6):
3. Alliances (7):
4. Wisdom (8):
5. Armies (9):

This would all come to a bitter end. Edom's prideful arrogance will be their downfall (3). They feel secure at this moment, but Obadiah warns that they will feel the full vent of God's wrath coming.

Obadiah 10-14

God lays out his case against Edom for their specific sins against the Israelites. Write down some of the details of each of these trespasses.

- They were Israel's brothers (10)
- They stood aloof (11)

- They gloated (12)
- They exploited (13-14)

What despicable behaviors do you see today that parallel the Edomites and arouse God's anger?

Obadiah 15-16

- Explain the importance of the Day of the Lord.
- Explain the meaning of these two key verses in your own words in the context of the Edomites and in the context of today.

Obadiah 17-20

Bleak destruction is coming for the mountains of Edom. But God promises there is hope for and from Mount Zion (where Jerusalem was built). ***What are the details of the following descriptions of Zion?***

1. Safety (17a, 21):
2. Holiness (17b):
3. Inheritance (17c):
4. Unity (18a):
5. Victory (18b-20):

Compare and contrast what God is doing on Mount Seir (Edom) and Mount Zion (Israel).

Obadiah 21

- Obadiah ends on a hope-filled prophetic note.
- Deliverers will rule from Mount Zion. This term is broad enough to include political and spiritual "saviors."
- This obviously sets the reader's mind toward the line of King David and the coming of the Messiah.
- ***After reading Obadiah, how could people misunderstand Jesus' ministry while he was on earth?***

Application

- Despised people who feel helpless to throw off their oppressors can have hope through the "day of the Lord." God will exact his vengeance on those who harm his people.
- Look up and discuss some of these key verses related to hope for the oppressed. (Prov 20:22; Isa 59:17; Nah 1:2; Rom 12:19; Heb 10:30; Rev 6:9-17)
- ***How does Revelation 6:9-11 help us understand God's justice for the oppressed?***
- ***Even when you feel like injustices have been done, do trust that God will take care of the wicked in his timing just like he did the Edomites?***
- ***Until that day comes, in what ways can you live out Jesus' command to "love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us"?*** (Matt 5:33-34)

Session 3: Nahum Historical Background

75% of the book of Nahum is predictive toward the fall of the Assyrian capital, Nineveh.

- ***What does Nahum's name mean?***
- ***How does God prophesying the destruction of Nineveh bring comfort to the Israelites?***

Authorship and Dating

Very little is known about the prophet Nahum.

- This is the only prophetic work that identifies itself as a “book.” (1:1)
- Some think this is an indication that Nahum is less of a preacher and more of a scholarly writer or composer.
- Nahum is from Elkosh. The location is unknown and is not mentioned anywhere else in Scripture. Some think it may be Capernaum which means “the village of Nahum.”

What major events happened on each of these dates that help us piece together the context of Nahum's prophecy?

- 780-760 BC
- 722 BC
- 625 BC
- 612 BC

Nahum was written between 663-612 BC, likely sometime closer to Nineveh's ultimate demise (625-612 BC).

The Ninevites

The opening verse describes the purpose for Nahum's writing: “A prophecy concerning Nineveh.”

- This prophecy is literally an oracle of “burden.” (Isa 12:1; 14:28; 15:1; 21:1; 22:1; 23:1; Jer 23:22-27; Zech 9:1)
- It is a threatening message from God about Nineveh's impending doom.
- As the capital, Nineveh can be read as a representation for the Assyrian Empire. (3:18)

Jonah and Nahum

As we have been talking about the history of the Ninevites, you may remember:

- Jonah was called to preach God's impending destruction of the people because of their wickedness. This was between 780-760 BC.
- Jonah reluctantly obeyed the Lord, and the Ninevites believed God and repented. (Jonah 3:5)
- God decided to relent his anger toward the Ninevites because they turned from their wicked ways. (Jonah 3:10)
- The city was spared. Jonah knew that he is a “gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love.” (Jonah 4:2)

The Lord relented because Nineveh repented during Jonah's ministry. ***Why is God so angry and hostile towards them 150 years later when Nahum is writing?***

- It could be because Jonah preached during a time of Assyrian weakness under Shalmaneser IV.
- The people were more receptive because they were hurting and because a guy had just been puked out of a great fish.
- The Assyrians expanded their reign of terror as they grew strong under Tiglath-pileser III and Shalmaneser V.
- The Ninevites were ruthless to the Israelites and took Northern Israel into captivity in 722 BC.

While they repented at the preaching of Jonah, it was short-lived. The Assyrians viciously invaded lands and intimidated all who stood in their path of terror:

- Raped and pillaged.
- Sacrificed children.
- Cut off hands and feet, ears, and noses.
- Gouged out eyes, lopped off heads.
- Impaled people for sport and piled corpses at the city gate.
- Flayed victims alive and displayed their skins on the city walls.

Conclusion

The Assyrians dismantled Northern Israel and were a constant threat to Southern Judah, particularly Jerusalem. A reckoning is coming, and God will use Nahum to deliver this message of complete destruction of this wicked superpower nation.

Jonah presents God as "slow to anger and abounding in love." Nahum reminds the Ninevites that "the Lord is slow to anger but great in power; the Lord will not leave the guilty unpunished." (1:3)

Nahum is a great book of comfort and hope when we see people suffering at the hands of evil. Nahum promises, "The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him, but with an overwhelming flood he will make an end to Nineveh." (1:7-8)

Session 4: Nahum 1

The first chapter sets forth the detailed description of God's disposition and power that will bring down the Assyrian Empire. Read Nahum 1:2-8. God is...

- jealous (1:2a; Ex 34:14)
- full of vengeance (1:2b)
- full of wrath (1:2b)
- slow to anger (1:3)
- great in power (1:3-6)
- punisher (1:3b)

Which of these attributes of God listed would you consider positive?

Notice right after Nahum lists these fierce attributes of God, he says, "The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble."

It's tempting for Christians today to only lean into John 3:16 or 1 John 4:16. Yes, God loves the world and God is love, but this does not cancel his wrath.

- If God is the protector of the vulnerable, then he is the punisher of the wicked assailant.
- In his love, God refuses to ignore sin or enables unholy behavior.
- All the qualities listed in Nahum 1:2-6 reflect God's love for us.

Nahum 1:9-15 reveals Assyria's specific crimes against Judah.

- Nineveh is not just plotting against their neighboring nations, but against the Lord himself. He promises this will not happen twice. (1:9-11)
- God acknowledges that he used the Assyrians as the rod of discipline against Judah. (1:12; cf. Isa 10:5) This happened during the reign of Ahaz. (2 Kgs 16:1-9; 2 Chr 28:1-27) and Manasseh (2 Kgs 21:1-16; 2 Chr 33:10-11) However, this does not justify the wicked actions of the Assyrians.
- List God's Promises of Comfort
 1. 1:13
 2. 1:14
 3. 1:15 (cf. Isa 52:7; Rom 10:15)

Nahum 1 - Wrap-Up

- Compare and contrast Jonah 4:2 and Nahum 1:3 in context.
 1. Nineveh experienced God's love in the wake of their repentance.
 2. But over the course of 100 years, they returned to their violence and wickedness. They are threatening the very people that introduced them to the Lord.

“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

- ***How does 2 Peter 3:9-10 relate to Nahum?***
- If you are doing a study of Nahum, you are probably not on the same destructive path as the Ninevite. ***However, do you have people in your life who are on a path of destruction?***
- ***How are you responding to them regarding Jesus?*** He is patient, but the day of reckoning is coming.

Session 5: Nahum 2-3

Nahum 2 - A Vision of Vengeance

Read Nahum 2:1-10. ***What imagery is used to describe how God will repay the Assyrians for what they did to innocent nations around them?***

Verse 10 is a personified poem to summarize the events of this bloodied day. Imagining Nineveh as an abused woman, Nahum states,

*“She is pillaged, plundered, and stripped!
Hearts melt, knees give way,
bodies tremble, every face grows pale.”*

Nahum 2:11-12 provides a mocking question. Rhetorical questions often accentuate God’s moral indignation toward injustices (cf. Zech 8:16). He asks, “Where the strong lion is now?” The lion (Nineveh) can no longer provide or protect (2:11-13a).

Chapter 2 concludes with an inclusio, “The voices of your messengers will no longer be heard.” (2:13b) As Nineveh’s messengers are silenced in sorrow, Israel’s are shouting good news of peace. (1:15)

Nahum 3 - A Vision of Vindication

Vindication is evidence that God’s wrathful actions are right, reasonable, and justifiable. ***How does Nahum 3:1-4 display God’s vindication?***

Because of these acts, God sets his face against Nineveh by treating her like a prostitute (more personification Nahum 3:5-7 cf. Isa 47:3; Jer 13:22; Hos 2:3,10).

List the ways Nineveh will be humiliated like a prostitute from Nahum 3:5-7:

List the ways Nineveh will be punished beyond the humiliation (3:10):

The final words of Nahum are a personal message to the King of Assyria. Read Nahum 3:18-19.

- His shepherds, nobles, and other people will lay down to “rest.” (lit: death, 3:18)

- The king would receive a mortal wound. (3:19a) This comes as Nineveh was completely destroyed in 612 BC. It is covered by windblown sand and will never rise again.
- The rest of Assyria will scatter and finally collapse in 605 BC by Nebuchadnezzar at the battle of Carchemish.
- The book ends with one final reminder of why all this pain and suffering was due to Assyria's capital city.

*All who hear the news about you
clap their hands at your fall,
for who has not felt
your endless cruelty. (3:19)*

Application

It's amazing that God used this prophet to predict the downfall of a ruthless superpower, and every word held true. Describe how God is good even when exacting vengeance.

How do you respond to those who think God is full of wrath and vengeance in the Old Testament but loving and graceful in the New Testament?

How does Romans 11:22 help with this false notion?

We see consistently in the prophets that God keeps his promises of love and protection. We also get to see how he keeps those promises through justice.

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