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Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah

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For my teachers, Gene Rice and Ibrahim Farajajé

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Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	*Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*. Edited by David Noel Freeman. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992
ANE	Ancient Near East
AOTC	Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries
AYB	Anchor Yale Bible Commentary
BCE	Before the Common Era
BDAG	Danker, Frederick W., Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
BDB	Brown, Francis, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*
BHS	*Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation Series
CAD	*The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.* Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1956–2006
CE	Common Era
CEB	Common English Bible

DCH	*Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*. Edited by David J. A. Clines. 9 vols. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 1993–2014
DSS	Dead Sea Scrolls
FCB	Feminist Companion to the Bible
GBS	Guides to Biblical Scholarship
HALOT	*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann J. Stamm. Translated and edited under the supervision of Mervyn E. J. Richardson. 4 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1994–1999
HB	Hebrew Bible
IEJ	*Israel Exploration Journal*
IFT	Introductions in Feminist Theology
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JFSR	*Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*
JPS	Jewish Publication Society
JRT	*Journal of Religious Thought*
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
KJV	King James Version of the Bible
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NETS	*A New English Translation of the Septuagint*. Edited by Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007
NIV	New International Version
NKJV	New King James Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology
OtSt	*Oudtestamentische Studien*
RSV	Revised Standard Version

SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SymS	Symposium Series
TDOT	*Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Edited by G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren. Translated by John T. Willis et al. 8 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974–2006
TWOT	*Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. Edited by R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke. 2 vols. Chicago: Moody Press, 1980
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*

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Nahum

Author's Introduction

Nahum's Troubling God: When God Is Not Worthy

The proclamations of Nahum are the prophecies of a violently angry, bloodthirsty[1] God,[2] "words of hatred, abuse and delight in divine retribution."[3] The presentation of God is as troubling as is the reality of readers, interpreters, and preachers reading the description of God in Nahum literally. The text of Nahum is a literary composition that describes itself as being produced as a ספר, "book" or "scroll," in Nahum 1:1.[4] This characterization distinguishes the text of Nahum from other prophetic collections and points to the writing of Nahum as a prophetic

1. Valerie Bridgeman, "Nahum," in *Africana Bible*, ed. Hugh Page Jr., et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 194.

2. I am using "God" to render YHWH rather than "Lord," as does the NRSV, to resist explicitly gendering the deity. In places where I quote the biblical text I will use "God" in large-and-small caps as is the convention for rendering the Tetragrammaton.

3. Michael Carden, "The Book of the Twelve Minor Prophets," in *The Queer Bible Commentary*, ed. Deryn Guest (London: SCM, 2006), 472.

4. None of the other prophetic texts are described as a book or scroll in their superscription. The text of Jeremiah is called a book/scroll in Jer 25:13; 30:2. Isaiah (30:8; 34:16) and Malachi (3:16) also mention scrolls.

activity.[5] Nahum is a multilayered text woven into its final form by an unknown person or persons. Among those layers are traditions, perhaps including archived sayings, of an ancestral prophet Nahum in whose mouth the written text of Nahum is placed. Nahum is also a character in the text, the speaker-prophet, and, to some degree, the creation of its author and final redactor. The relative anonymity of Nahum in the text—his one descriptor, "the Elqoshi" in 1:1, is obscure—and the admission that the work was crafted as a written work facilitate a literary reading of Nahum. The writing prophet is also a "Nahum," a poet-prophet communicating a prophetic vision.[6] Each Nahum in the layers of text and tradition is in his or her way prophetic.[7]

Like the recalcitrant Jonah, Nahum's prophetic gaze is set on Nineveh, the "city of blood" whose king is perpetually wicked.[8] Targum Jonathan explicitly links Jonah (prophet and book) with Nahum by positioning Nahum's prophecy as a response to Nineveh's return to her[9] sinful ways after a brief period of repentance due to Jonah's preaching (1:1). Unlike Jonah, Nahum has no reprieve for Nineveh. Nahum's proclamations are not dispassionate judgment or justice; they are vengeful. Nahum offers extreme examples of standard prophetic categories: proclamations against other nations and proclamations of judgment and doom and, buried within raging rhetoric, a word of comfort for Judah, a traditional salvation proclamation in 1:12-13 with additional words of comfort in 1:15 (2:1 MT).

In the book of Nahum, Judah is the Southern Monarchy, still standing after the fall of the Northern Monarchy to the Assyrians in 723 BCE. The fall of Samaria and the North is religiously, culturally, politically, and economically devastating. The Assyrians deport a significant portion of

5. The superscription identifies the text of Nahum as a חזון, a prophetic vision of Nahum (but not surprisingly of God). The identity of the written text as a prophecy presents Nahum in its final form as a prophetic production and thereby establishes its author, the poet, as a prophet.

6. Carol Dempsey considers this vision to have been "an intuitive experience." Carol J. Dempsey, *Amos, Hosea, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk*, New Collegeville Biblical Commentary (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2013), 108.

7. There is no way to identify this poet's gender. I prefer the masculine pronoun because of the ways in which the Nahums blend into each other and because the notion of a woman writing these vicious, sexually violent lyrics is particularly jarring.

8. Contra NRSV "city of bloodshed" in 3:1 and the king's "endless cruelty" in 3:19.

9. Cities in the ancient Israel and the Afro-Asian confluence of the ancient Near East were often portrayed as female. The gender designation was often a function of grammar or cultural understanding with the city as mother, protectress, or the charge of a particular deity.

the population of ten[10] tribes (2 Kgs 17:18-23). Second Kings describes the resettlement of the land of Israel (the Northern Monarchy) by foreigners deported by Assyria from other conquered lands (2 Kgs 17:24). Under the shadow of Assyria and its capital Nineveh, Judah is nominally independent, self-governing but paying heavy tribute to the Assyrians, and subject to harassment and invasion with little or no provocation.

From a literary perspective Nineveh is the subject[11] of these proclamations, but the Ninevites cannot be expected to have heard them or to have read them. Neither Nahum the character nor his purported ancestral antecedent has been sent to Nineveh like Jonah. It is certainly possible the proclamation in part or whole would have made its way to Nineveh, perhaps provoking alarm at the possibility of the threat from another people's god. Reading from the perspective of Nahum the character, it may be the judgment of God against Nineveh is final and determinative, so it matters not whether Nineveh has heard these words. Yet portions of the text are composed as though there is an audience present other than its target. Judah is the intended audience for the prophet Nahum's message in the setting of the book.

The book itself speaks to a wider audience than seventh-century Judah (with or without Nineveh), encompasses a broader time period than its 663 to 612 BCE setting, and is shaped by hands other than those of a prophet called Nahum. Duane L. Christensen collates the scholarship and proffers six periods in which the book of Nahum as it now stands could have been finalized:

1. soon after the fall of Thebes to Ashurbanipal in 663 BCE
2. around the time of Ashurbanipal's death (ca. 630 BCE)
3. just before the fall of Nineveh in 612 BCE
4. shortly after the fall of Assyria
5. after the fall of Assyria in the exilic and/or postexilic period
6. the Maccabean period (ca. 175–165 BCE)[12]

10. Counting each of the half-tribes of Manasseh and Naphtali separately; they are the descendants of Joseph and rarely reckoned as a tribe along with the descendants of his brothers. Levi never received an allotment of land and Simeon is located in the interior of Judah.

11. I use the term "subject" to describe the contents of the proclamation and the term "target" to refer to the addressee.

12. Duane L. Christensen, *Nahum: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AYB (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 54.

What is certain is Thebes has fallen prior to the finalization of the book and its composition, if Nahum 3:8 is original to the book. If the book is finalized and promulgated prior to the fall of Nineveh, it interprets the signs of Assyria's decline and predicts its inevitable fall. If early, Nahum's rhetoric could have been used to encourage and support rebellion either when Assyria seemed invincible or when the behemoth began to totter. Christensen himself dates the redaction of Nahum to the Babylonian exile, arguing for its production as a "numerical and musical" composition, noting the inability to identify any Nahum text independent of the Book of the Twelve.[13] Whether reading/hearing Nahum in light of the internal Josian context, on the cusp of its decline or in the aftermath of its fall, Nineveh's fate is an object lesson in God's power and concern for Judah, both of which were subject to questioning in light of the Assyrian subjugation of Judah. As is the case with much of the biblical, especially prophetic, literature, Nahum's proclamations can be reinterpreted with regard to the Babylonians and other subsequent foes.

Women as well as men would hear these proclamations and perhaps read them, yet their target audience is male, as is the case for the Hebrew Scriptures writ large. Since women's bodies supply the imagery for Nineveh's plunder and rapine, I join Renita Weems in wondering "what did it do to ancient Hebrew women to hear and be subjected to such ranting of prophets in the squares and market places" and, I add, in sacred spaces, given Nahum's likely address to Judah in the Jerusalem temple complex?[14]

The language of the text is vengeful and wrathful (1:2), portraying God as raw power (1:3-5) and as fulfilling Torah: Nahum 1:3 reproduces the opening words of Numbers 14:18, יהוה ארך אפים, "God is slow to anger," but omits the intermediate lines about divine love and forgiveness then moves to execute judgment with another direct quote from the verse, ונקה לא ינקה, "by no means clearing (the guilty)." Nahum does not reproduce the latter portion of Numbers 14:18. According to the internal logic of the book, the venomously vitriolic proclamations of Nahum are an *apologia* for the well-deserved fate of Nineveh the dispossessor of cities, most notably Samaria and the entire Northern Israelite monarchy (2 Kgs 15:29-31; 17:3-6, 24; 18:9-12). This reading recognizes and rejects that rationale, refusing to grant legitimacy to language and imagery built on the savaging of a woman's body—even a metaphorical one.

13. Ibid., 4–17, 54–55. He begins his commentary with a lengthy "Logoprosodic" analysis of the text to demonstrate its structure as a numerical composition.

14. Renita Weems, *Battered Love: Marriage, Sex, and Violence in the Hebrew Prophets* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 8; see also the discussion on 41–42 and 66–67.

The rhetoric of Nahum is gendered; using the limited categories[15] of biblical Hebrew in which cities are grammatically feminine, Nahum portrays Nineveh as a hybridized city-woman, common in the Scriptures and across the broader ancient Near East (ANE) where cities were not just feminine but often female, regularly conflated with goddesses in close, often intimate, relationships with their human king. The city-as-woman metaphor shapes and is shaped by Israelite gender constructions of women and men.[16] It plays on cultural stereotypes and reinforces existing stereotypes,[17] but contrary to the dominant pattern in the Hebrew Scriptures in which cities are regularly castigated, ANE city-women were not disparaged in their literature.[18] In Nahum, Nineveh,[19] Thebes,[20] and Judah[21] are all configured as female using feminine grammar. Put, Nubia (Ethiopia), Egypt, and Libya mentioned briefly in the same context should be understood in the same way.

While not named, Ishtar, the principle deity[22] of Assyria and all Mesopotamia and protectress of and resident in Nineveh, lurks behind the scenes of Nahum. As Ishtar is sovereign over war and sexual desire,[23] the Sargonoid monarchs understood themselves to be beloved by Ishtar and under her benefaction.[24] An attack on Nineveh is an attack on Ishtar, since gods were as closely associated with their cities as they were with

15. In biblical Hebrew and other Semitic languages, every noun, whether animate or not, is either feminine or masculine. In some cases, i.e., people and animals, grammatical gender is directly linked to biological sex.

16. Julia M. O'Brien, *Nahum*, Readings: A New Biblical Commentary (London: Black, 2002), 92.

17. Weems, *Battered Love*, 23, 79, 107.

18. Ibid., 45.

19. Nineveh's gendering is clear given its portrayal as woman; Nah 3:4 and 7 make Nineveh's feminine gender explicit.

20. Nahum 3:8 communicates Thebes's gendering with the third-person feminine singular pronoun לָהּ, "her."

21. Judah's feminine gender is clear in Nah 1:15 (2:1 MT) when reading in Hebrew; it is not obvious in English.

22. Simo Parpola argues Ishtar is the "mother aspect" of Asshur, the male deity for which Assyria is named, one with him and distinct from him at the same time, Simo Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, State Archives of Assyria, vol. 9 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1997), xxxvi.

23. Laurel Lanner, *"Who Will Lament Her?" The Feminine and the Fantastic in the Book of Nahum*, vol. 11 (New York: T & T Clark, 2006), 37, 60–61.

24. Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses: Women, Culture, and the Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth* (New York: Free Press, 1992), 63–64.

their temples.[25] Moreover, Nahum specifically targeted Nineveh's gods though he did not name them (Nah 1:14).

Judah is the audience of the book but not its target; thus, Nahum offers no prophetic delineation of sin designed to bring about repentance. Nahum targets Nineveh with the rhetoric of sexualized violence other prophets direct toward Israel and Judah, usually to bring about their repentance.[26] Neither God nor Nahum, however, provide opportunity for repentance because none will be accepted. The traditional vocabulary[27] for sin is entirely lacking along with means of redress, though Nineveh is briefly identified as counseling and executing "evil" and "wickedness" (Nah 1:11, 15 [2:1 MT]). The rationale for deploying punitive sexual violence against Nineveh is not the same as it is for Judah. Nineveh is not the wife[28] of God whom God has a particular right to discipline with violence for adultery and betrayal. God has the power to do so and punishes her anyway.

Without the marital metaphor as its underpinning, the divine violence against Nineveh can be constructed as an indication of God's universal sovereignty and/or revenge for the Assyrian imperial violence against Israel/Judah, i.e., the siege of Jerusalem in 701 BCE and the fall of the Northern Monarchy in 723/22 BCE. From the perspective of Nineveh the violence enacted by Israelite warriors might have been experienced as a rebellion or uprising in one of its provinces. The sexual violence would not have been particularly shocking to Nineveh or Israel as it commonly accompanied the waging of war in the ancient world; sexual violence

25. Lanner, *Who Will Lament Her?*, 57–79. Additionally, Lanner posits one or more Israelite/Canaanite goddess Asherah or Astarte influenced by and/or partially conflated with Ishtar, including as the Queen of Heaven may lie underneath the text of Nahum (74–79).

26. Though Jeremiah pessimistically deems Judah as likely "to do good" as Nubians are to change their skin in Jer 13:23, he nevertheless holds out the possibility of repentance, asking how long until Judah is restored from her transgression. Ezekiel's rationalization implies the possibility of, and failure to, repent in Ezek 23:8-9, specifying that because Samaria (called Oholah) did not give up her "whorings" she was subjected to violence. The transgressions of and retaliations against Samaria (Oholah) and Jerusalem (Oholibah) are expressed in violent pornotropic language.

27. The Hebrew words for "sin," "transgression," "iniquity," etc., are lacking.

28. I normally eschew the language of marriage with reference to the Hebrew Scriptures, given the variety of conjugal configurations that do not correspond readily to contemporary notions and forms of marriage. The relationship of God and Israel in the Scriptures is, however, cast as a male-female hierarchal conjugal union.

continues to be deployed in the prosecution of a war, simultaneously condemned as a war crime.[29]

In addition, unlike when sexually violent language is deployed against Israel or Judah, there will be no reconciliation after the assault.[30] I am using the language of rape and sexual assault in the modern sense to indicate a lack of consent given by the women (predominantly here) for sexual contact even though the hearers and readers of Nahum may not have regarded the events in the same light. One major difference between Israelite and contemporary understandings of rape is in the Hebrew Scriptures rape was a crime against a man in a patriarchal system[31]—a husband, fiancé, or father—and not a crime against the woman herself.

Even though Nineveh was inhabited by human persons and her fate is the fate of those persons, the rhetoric that personifies Nineveh can make it easy to regard the city abstractly and to lose focus of her people. Assyria is, in the eyes of Israel and the redactors of the Hebrew Bible, an "evil empire."[32] The reader/hearer is supposed to believe Assyria and her people deserve what happens to them. The text keeps the reader/hearer focused on the circumstances of Nineveh's people by describing the fate of select individuals and groups with no expectation of sympathy. The people of Nineveh are very much present in Nahum and represented by enslaved women beating their breasts and moaning like doves (2:7 [2:8 MT]), the Assyrian people as a whole or perhaps just the military

29. Gerlinde Baumann, "Nahum: The Just God as Sexual Predator," in *Feminist Biblical Interpretation: A Compendium of Critical Commentary on the Books of the Bible and Related Literature*, ed. Luise Schottroff and Marie-Theres Wacker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 433–42, at 438.

30. See Hos 2:14, 19-20; 14:4-7 for the language of reconciliation and even honeymooning alternating with cycles of violence in the book.

31. While the entire social and religious culture of ancient Israel cannot be simply categorized as patriarchal, the term does describe the system in which the rape of a woman or girl is a crime against men.

32. Ronald Reagan infamously uttered the words "evil empire" when describing the former Soviet Union to the National Association of Evangelicals in Orlando, Florida, March 9, 1983. Empire as much as the persons and nations that are constitutive of it dominate, oppress, subjugate, enslave, rape, exploit, and dispossess. See Mitri Raheb's characterization of empire as "demonic" and resistance to empire as "an act of faith" in Mitri Raheb, *Faith in the Face of Empire: The Bible through Palestinian Eyes* (New York: Orbis Books, 2014), 100. From a womanist perspective, empire is an evil that opposes the well-being of the beloved community. Empire can be reckoned as a self-perpetuating organism, mechanism, or entity that transcends historical social-political exemplars.

derided as [being like] women (3:13), and heaps of unmourned, unburied bodies in the streets (3:3).[33] The dignitaries of Thebes bound in fetters are present in 3:10, along with an untold number of infants who are subject to a grisly death. The mothers whose babies were smashed at every street corner are absent. In contrast, the people of Judah, the undifferentiated charge of their vengeful divine protector and arguable audience for the diatribe that is Nahum, are only minimally present.[34]

The text reveals little of the person of Nahum, no lineage, no royal affiliation, but does provide in 1:1 a possible hometown, Elkosh, which is otherwise unknown (the Targum reads Beth Qoshi). No discernable link exists between Elkosh and the Galilean town Capernaum, כפר נחם, traditionally understood to be the home, *caper*, "town," of Nahum. Nahum's prophecies would seem to be somewhat at odds with his name; the stem נחם means "comfort" or, perhaps more contextually appropriate, "relent." Nineveh's repentance in response to Jonah's preaching is styled as "God relented," וינחם, and did not bring destruction on them in Jonah 3:10.

Nahum's proclamations must certainly postdate Assyrian colonization and incorporation of Samaria in 723/22 BCE. They can be read as either predating and predicting the fall of Nineveh in August 612 BCE or as postdating Nineveh's fall, as a response to its demise, an act of interpretation prophecy. The text may well straddle the fall of Nineveh. The verbs range from imperfect to perfect and include participles that transcend time. A single dating indicator is present in the text: the fall of Thebes[35] in 663 BCE (3:8) has already happened, so the text would have been composed between then and (or just shortly after) 612 BCE.[36]

While not making an argument about the unity of the corpus or authorship, I am taking Nahum as a literary whole. In general I resist emend-

33. In 3:7, Nahum, or perhaps God, asks who will mourn for fallen Nineveh. No answer is given. Why would anyone lament the fall of Nineveh? Who indeed would do such a thing?

34. Judah appears once in 1:15 (2:1 MT). Israel does not appear at all; Jacob signifying Israel appears only in 2:1 (2:2 MT).

35. I will take up the identification of Thebes in the commentary on 3:8.

36. For the possibilities of even later dating, see Christensen, *Nahum*, 54–56. See also Ehud Ben Zvi who offers four contexts and periods in which the fifteen prophetic books of the Hebrew Scriptures could have been produced, ranging from "neo-Babylonian Judah" in 586–538 BCE to the breadth of the diaspora, 586–332 BCE. Ehud Ben Zvi, "The Concept of Prophetic Books and Its Historical Setting," in *The Production of Prophecy: Constructing Prophecy and Prophets in Yehud*, ed. Diana V. Edelman and Ehud Ben Zvi (London: Equinox, 2009), 73–95, esp. 79–80.

ing the text beyond the scribal corrections in the Masoretic Text (MT). The Hebrew of Nahum is vivid, sonorous, and complex, characterized by dizzying shifts in pronouns.[37] In order to make sense of them I have divided Nahum's proclamations into four prophecies[38] following the superscription, breaking the text at each Masoretic subdivision indicated by ס or פ:[39]

I. Superscription, 1:1
II. Prophecy 1, 1:2-11, a hymn of praise to God
III. Prophecy 2, 1:12-13, a brief address to Judah
IV. Prophecy 3, 1:14–2:13 (1:14–2:14 MT), proclamations to multiple subjects
   a. proclamation to and against Nineveh and/or her king in 1:14
   b. proclamation to Judah as an aside in 1:15
   c. proclamation to and against Nineveh and/or her king in 2:1
   d. second proclamation to Judah as an aside 2:2 (2:1, 3 MT)
V. Prophecy 4, 3:1-19, "woe"[40] prophecy, escalation of violent rhetoric against Nineveh to sexual assault

37. See the discussions of the specific proclamations for the range of gender identifications through pronoun use.

38. I am using "proclamations" to describe the content of Nahum's prophetic discourse broadly and "prophecies" to describe discrete units within that block. An oracle, a prophetic utterance, is the technical description of prophecy represented by משא, the description of the contents of Nahum in 1:1; משא is the first word of the book. Since the text of Nahum is by its own description a book, the oracular language is a literary construction.

39. In the MT individual passages are delineated with a soft break marked with a ס and a hard break indicated by a פ, most often at the end of a verse. The content of what I have labeled prophecy 3 is the most difficult to define. I read the third prophecy as beginning in 1:14, signaled by וצוה עליך יהוה, indicating a new proclamation parallel to כה אמר יהוה, which begins prophecy 2 in 1:12. The negative proclamation of Nah 1:14 can function as a standalone proclamation since it is closed by a major Masoretic break. Given that the following verses switch from Nineveh to Judah as the addressee and back again Nah 1:14 can also be read as introducing a collection of alternating addresses bundled together as a single oracular proclamation.

40. A "woe" oracle or prophecy is a specialized subgenre of prophecy characterized by the word "woe," הוי, generally as the first word.

Inasmuch as the book of Nahum is a response to Assyrian imperial domination, the text is postcolonial literature. As the Babylonian Empire replaced the Assyrian Empire and successive waves of oppression and occupation followed in their wake, Nahum's rhetoric remained serviceable, meriting a commentary by the Qumran community in *Pesher Nahum* (on Nah 1:3-6 and 2:11–3:14) and an address by Josephus in *Antiquities*.[41] There were also multiple manuscripts and fragments of the Twelve dispersed among different sites.[42]

Nahum has been studied in whole and in part by feminists owing largely to the female personification of Nineveh and her sexual assault by God. This womanist and feminist reading of Nahum will: (1) examine the use of gender in Nahum, (2) attempt to identify underlying female characters, and (3) pay particular attention to the ways in which actual and metaphorical female bodies are subject to human and divine violence. That violence occurs in prophetic and divine rhetoric. This volume will also consider the implications of that rhetoric for contemporary readers for whom Nahum is Scripture.

41. O'Brien, *Nahum*, 14, 40.

42. 4QXII^{g} (Nah 1:7-9; 2:9-11; 3:1-3, 17); the Greek manuscript of the Twelve, 8HevXIIgr, contains Nah 1:13-14; 2:5-10, 14; 3:3, 6-17. There is also a catena on the end times in 4QMidr Eschat^{b} incorporating Nah 2:11; Nah 3:8-10 is present in the pseudo-Ezekiel text 4QpsEzek, and Nah 1:2 is in the A manuscript of the Damascus Document.

Nahum 1:1-11

Nahum's God Is Not the God of My Ancestors

Superscription (Nah 1:1)

The first word of Nahum is משא. The book presents itself as a technical form of prophecy, an "oracle" or "prophetic utterance." Yet those prophetic proclamations are no longer oracular—if they were ever spoken before being written. The text joins other prophetic works in the Hebrew Bible in being styled as a collection of prophecies that were once delivered orally.

According to the editor or narrator, Nahum practices two well-attested forms of prophecy: his משא, "prophecy," derives from a חזון, "vision."[1] The superscription proclaims the vision of Nahum has been transcribed; it is the only prophetic work called a "book"[2] in its superscription.[3] Unlike

1. Prophetic books described as oracles or prophetic utterances include Isaiah, Ezekiel, Habakkuk, Zechariah, and Malachi and, in Proverbs, Agur ben Jakeh (Prov 30:1) and the mother of King Lemuel (Prov 31:1). Prophets who are presented as experiencing visions include Isaiah, Ezekiel, Obadiah, Habakkuk, and Nathan in 1 Chr 17:15. The books of Samuel (1 Sam 3:1), Hosea (12:10), Micah (3:6), Psalms (89:19), Proverbs (29:18), Lamentations (2:9), and the breadth of Daniel describe visions as a normative prophetic or other revelatory experience.

2. A ספר is a "scroll." Books did not exist in the Iron Age. The common translation, "book," is anachronistic.

3. Julia M. O'Brien, *Nahum*, Readings: A New Biblical Commentary (London: Black, 2002), 41, 46, 65.

Nahum 1:1

1:1 An oracle concerning Nineveh.
The book of the vision of Nahum of
Elkosh.

other prophetic texts described as prophetic utterances, the intimation is that Nahum's author chose a literary rather than oral medium for the work; that suggestion is likely a literary strategy of the poet-prophet who adapted earlier traditions.[4] The framing with which Nahum as a literary work is presented is based on the superscription is of a prophet who wrote his prophecies out for dissemination and preservation. As a result, some regard the work as an epistle.[5]

Nineveh is named before naming Nahum, establishing the text's priorities from the beginning. Nineveh is mentioned by name three times throughout the work as the object of the proclamation.[6] Nineveh, its people, armies, monarchs, and gods are objects of God's vengeance proclaimed in the work that bears Nahum's name. Nahum, the literary character and the prophet who is invoked in and signified by this collection of oracular material, is not called a prophet.[7] The prophethood of Nahum is assumed. The poet who has woven the threads of a Nahum tradition with threads of his own weaving, thus crafting the work as it exists is, I argue, a prophet in his own right.

Nineveh was the capital of the Neo-Assyrian[8] Empire that decimated the Northern Monarchy, leaving a tithe of the people who were once

4. I consider that there are at least three Nahums intertwined: (1) an oracular prophet whose authority is conjured by the invocation of the name Nahum who may be entirely a literary creation, (2) a poet-prophet responsible for crafting the book in part or whole who may not be an individual but a school or guild like the Deuteronomist, and (3) the character of Nahum in the text.

5. Adam S. Van der Woude, "The Book of Nahum: A Letter Written In Exile," *OtSt* 20 (1977): 124.

6. Nah 1:1; 2:8 (2:9 MT); 3:7.

7. The only prophets with canonized works who are identified as prophets in the introductions to their prophetic collections are Haggai (1:1) and Zechariah (1:1). Amos famously rejects the mantel of a professional prophet in 7:14.

8. The Late (or Neo-)Assyrian Empire flourished from the mid-eighth century BCE until the fall of Nineveh in 612 BCE. Subduing Egypt and Philistia while incorporating Babylonia, Assyria was without rival at its peak strength. The strength of the empire in this period is attributed to the strength and ferocity of its ruling dynasty that began

known as Israel. The final capital of the empire and one of its four major cosmopolitan centers,[9] Nineveh represents the Assyrian Empire, the enemies of God and Judah, and every foreign threat, all of which keeps the rhetoric of Nahum alive beyond its originating context(s). Nineveh is wholly "other," with reference to Israel. Its otherness is indicated by its founding narrative, which highlights its architect, Nimrod, and his Hamite identity in Genesis 10:8-10 and Micah 5:6.[10]

TRANSLATION MATTERS

Within the first proclamation there is a partial and broken acrostic in Nahum 1:1-8.[11] Because the key letters are present at such varying intervals, ranging from one to three lines apart, no clarity exists as to whether these letters are intentional. It is possible a later hand attempted to identify, craft, or complete the acrostic but failed or gave up. Only half of the alphabet can be located in this tenuous structure. For this study, such details pertaining to the acrostic are irrelevant.

The Assyrian Empire dates from the mid-fourteenth century BCE, when it coalesced into what would become the Middle Assyrian Empire, then it waxed and waned until its fall. The fall of Assyria to the Babylonian Empire was more of an assimilation furthered by an internecine war in the mid-seventh century. The strength of Assyria was its dreaded army, a brutally efficient, ruthlessly competent, and highly organized infantry

with Tiglath-Pileser III (744–727 BCE) known as "Pul" in the Hebrew Bible (2 Kgs 15:19; 1 Chr 5:26). His successor, Shalmaneser V (726–722 BCE) was killed, and then Sargon II (722–701 BCE) seized the throne in the same year the empire conquered Samaria. As a result it is nearly impossible to know who to credit for the demise of the Israelite Northern Monarchy. The prominence of Sargon was such that all of these kings are called "Sargonoid."

9. The four major cities in Assyria were Arbela, Asshur, Calah, and Nineveh.

10. O'Brien, *Nahum*, 39.

11. The acrostic is partial or defective in the following ways: (1) The key words are not in the same position; e.g., א begins the first word of 1:2 but ב is either בעל in the middle of v. 2 or בסופה, "whirlpool," in v. 3. This is true for other letters. (2) The fourth letter, ד, is missing. (3) The acrostic breaks off after ה, which begins v. 5. The next letter, ו, is so ubiquitous as the primary conjunction it is not clear whether ותשא, which begins the second half of v. 5, is intended to be part of a larger pattern. At this point letter patterns are in the eye of the beholder; ל (לא, first word second phrase) and מ (מה, first word) are inverted in v. 9 and ס in v. 11, which must be taken from the section break, is followed by ר, רבים, in the middle of the first clause of v. 12.

and chariot corps.[12] The empire was characterized in its own time and for posterity by ruthless violence against the peoples it subjugated. Assyrian imperial violence was legendary, its images preserved for posterity in *bas reliefs* such as those documenting the infamous siege of Lachish.

Images of the siege preserved for posterity include prisoners stripped naked and impaled on sharp sticks, others with their skin flayed off and flesh cut away to the bone. Fallen monarchs could look forward to being put on display in a cage with the heads of recently executed sovereigns hung around their necks as reminders of their ultimate fate.[13]

Assyrian domination did not end in Israel with the fall of the Northern Monarchy. Judah paid significant tribute—"rent"—to Assyria to retain its throne. At one point Hezekiah (716–686 BCE) even peeled the gold off the Jerusalem temple doors when the silver in its treasury was insufficient to slake their demands (2 Kgs 18:15-16).[14] Though Judah miraculously sur-

12. Albert Kirk Grayson, "History and Culture of Assyria," *ABD* 4:732–55.

13. Duane L. Christensen, *Nahum: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AYB (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 336.

14. The account of Hezekiah's submission can be found in 2 Kgs 18:13-16. Sennacherib's account includes the exact amount of silver recorded in the biblical text, along with a much larger tribute, including women from the royal household, some of whom are identified as Hezekiah's daughters. William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger Jr., eds., *The Context of Scripture*, vol. 2: *Monumental Inscriptions from the Biblical World* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 303.

vived an (unexpectedly interrupted) Assyrian siege in 701 BCE, the miracle did not include liberation from Assyrian subjugation.[15] Judah's relative stability under Hezekiah and his much maligned son Manasseh (696–642 BCE) was likely due to the stability of the Assyrian Empire and Judah's submission to Assyria, however reluctant. The transition from Manasseh through Amon (643–640 BCE) to Josiah (641–609 BCE) accompanied the decline of the empire and coincides with the putative frame of the contents Nahum, from the fall of Thebes (663 BCE) to the fall of Nineveh (612 BCE).

Prophecy 1 (Nah 1:2-11)

> *A God jealous and vengeful (is) The Divine Warrior,*[16]
> *vengeful is the Divine Warrior and Lord*[17] *of Wrath.*
> *The Divine Warrior takes vengeance.*[18]

The opening proclamation of Nahum is a hymn of praise to a devastatingly powerful God who will wield cosmic power against any and all enemies. This proclamation could also be classified as a psalm and may have come to function as a liturgy commemorating the fall of Nineveh.[19] The Divine Warrior will prosecute a holy war[20] that will encapsulate natural and supernatural forces against Nineveh.[21] God's empyrean power couples with the will and desire to destroy God's enemies embodied in

15. The biblical text provides two explanations for the miracle: (1) a senior military and administrative official (the Rabshakeh) heard a rumor that the Nubian pharaoh Tirhakah was moving against him (2 Kgs 19:7-9), and (2) God smote 185,000 Assyrians, resulting in their king, Sennacherib, returning home to be assassinated (2 Kgs 19:35-37). These accounts are duplicated in Isa 37:1-37.

16. I am using the imagery and theme of the subunit to flesh out *qere* readings of YHWH following the example of Joel Rosenberg, who supplies the translations in David A. Teutsch and Betsy Platkin Teutsch, *Kol Haneshemah: Shabbat Vehagim*, 3rd ed. (Elkins Park, PA: Reconstructionist Press, 2000).

17. The text has בעל here, hence the lack of large-and-small caps. Baal, which I translate as "Lord" here, intentionally overlaps with Lord, the traditional *qere* for YHWH. Whether there are one, two, or three deities in the first verse is neither clear nor, perhaps, supposed to be clear.

18. The translations of Scripture texts in the body of this commentary are mine; the NRSV text is, however, used for the sections of Scripture at the beginning of each chapter.

19. Laurel Lanner, *"Who Will Lament Her?" The Feminine and the Fantastic in the Book of Nahum*, vol. 11 (New York: T & T Clark, 2006), 7.

20. Arguably all sanctioned war in the Hebrew Scriptures is holy war. See Susan Thistlethwaite, " 'You May Enjoy the Spoil of Your Enemies': Rape as a Biblical Metaphor for War," *Semeia* 61 (1993): 61, 67.

21. Lanner, *Who Will Lament Her?*, 26.

Author's Introduction

The Prophet Who Talks Back

On its surface, the proclamations of Habakkuk might seem to have little to commend them for womanist or feminist study. The book contains no obvious gendered rhetoric, no female characters or actors, and no women. Yet, Habakkuk is a text about a prophet crying out on behalf of his community, which is a fundamental understanding of prophetic ministry in womanist and other Africana interpretive communities. The cry of Habakkuk, "How long, O Lord"[1] has been a staple in black preaching and a heart-cry of many womanists. It has also been a common hermeneutical response to the extra-judicial killings of black women, men, and children by police and in police custody, especially in recent times.[2] Habakkuk's interaction with the divine prefigures some womanist ways of relating to the world, the divine word, and the God in and of both.

1. In most places for simplicity I use "God" to render YHWH rather than "Lord," as does the NRSV, to resist explicitly gendering the deity, and I use "God" when quoting biblical text with יהוה, in keeping with conventions for rendering the Tetragrammaton. Here I use the familiar form of the quotation to introduce the discussion.

2. I began preparing this manuscript in the summer of 2015, during the burgeoning of the Black Lives Matter movement.

The book of Habakkuk has been shaped in such a way as to give the sense of dialogue, or, in the vernacular of the black church, call and response. The dialogue between Habakkuk and God has some parallels in the book of Job. The prophet[3] Habakkuk's primary question is one of theodicy, as is Job's primary motivation to seek God. Each book is heavily redacted into its current form. The books do have, however, significant points of departure. The discourse in Job is more serial monologue than dialogue. Another major difference between Habakkuk and Job is that Habakkuk entreats God on behalf of his people, not himself. Perhaps the most significant departure between the two corpora is the response of God to the complainant. God overwhelms Job with power and majesty, interrogating him, questioning Job's temerity to question God, casting his human frailty and comprehension in sharp relief to the God of storm, wind, all creation, its mysteries, and even its monsters. Conversely, in Habakkuk, God is a willing conversation partner, taking the prophet's complaints and questions seriously, answering them (to some degree),[4] and even responding to follow-up questions.

The books of Job and Habakkuk each offer a model of prayer that is honest, demanding, and confrontational in the same space as traditional, liturgical, reverently pious prayer. Habakkuk boldly calls on God to account for God's conduct. Habakkuk is not entirely satisfied with what he has heard and presses God for more answers, more clarity. In womanist parlance, Habakkuk talks back to God. Habakkuk is not easily soothed, swayed, or convinced; he takes a wait-and-see approach to God's declared intent. He is audacious in questioning God; in womanist terms, his audacity is womanish.[5] Further, God tells Habakkuk to "make it [his prophetic vision] plain" (2:2). Such language becomes not only

3. As is common for prophetic books "the prophet" is a literary character in the text, a poet crafting the dialogue in the book, and an ancestral prophetic figure whose proclamations have been preserved and/or revised or to whom these prophetic utterances have been ascribed in some combination.

4. Though God responds to Habakkuk, God does not answer the specific charges Habakkuk raises. The reader/hearer cannot discern whether God understands God's self to be directly answering Habakkuk's questions.

5. I am using the term "womanish" from Alice Walker's definition: "Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered 'good' for one. Interested in grown-up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown up. Interchangeable with another black folk expression: 'You trying to be grown' " (Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* [San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983], xi).

synonymous with the task of preaching in the black church but also a core commitment of womanists.[6]

The book of Habakkuk also presents the prophet as crafting a beautiful psalm that praises the power and fidelity of God in the same work in which the prophet questions what God is doing, a pattern echoed by the deep faith and piety of womanists who demand their own answers from God and know questioning and praising are not antithetical. Habakkuk's contested positionality, a prophet with apparent ties[7] to the dominant religious institution, vexes interpreters who understand authentic prophets to be found outside of institutions so they can legitimately critique them. If Habakkuk is indeed affiliated with the Jerusalem temple—which cannot be determined with any degree of certainty—that does not undercut his ability to function as a prophet.[8] The insider/outsider polemic is as problematic as are all rigid binaries. Womanists and feminists who maintain religious affiliations while critiquing those institutions and who accept biblical texts as Scripture while critiquing them and their depictions of God may find some solidarity with Habakkuk when read as an insider prophet. The wrestling of Habakkuk, text and prophet, with the core issues of theodicy—the justness of God, the power of God, and the actions/inactions of God in the face of undisputed evil—further commends the text to a womanist reading.

The book is composed of three chapters that roughly correspond with its three parts following the superscription: (1) 1:2–2:8 is an artfully crafted dialogue between Habakkuk and a wider unseen audience and God that transitions abruptly to (2) a brief collection of five "woe" prophecies in 2:6-20 (which overlap with the previous unit as 2:6-8 is both the end of the dialogue and the beginning of the woe prophecies) and (3) a psalm in 3:1-19. The subunits of the dialogue and the individual woes are delineated in their respective sections. The dialogue shifts from one speaker to another, Habakkuk to God and back again. In a number of exchanges, the speaker is not clearly identified, though in

6. Katie Geneva Cannon, "Womanist Interpretation and Preaching in the Black Church," in *I Found God in Me: A Womanist Reader*, ed. Mitzi Smith (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014), 56–67, at 63. See also the account of the founding of the Black Religious Scholars Group (BRSG) and their guiding vision to "make it plain" by Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas in *Black Church Studies: An Introduction* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007), xv.

7. The precise liturgical instructions in chapter 3 have led some to speculate that Habakkuk was a priest or otherwise connected to the liturgical corps in Jerusalem.

8. Julia M. O'Brien, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, AOTC (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004), 62–63.

most cases the speaker can be determined by the content of the address. The book contains some textual plurality and a few passages that defy honest translation, particularly in chapter 3. As a rule I will follow the reconstructions in the NRSV unless otherwise specified.

For all its vibrant language, the book is surprisingly vague. When does Habakkuk prophesy? In what historical context? What is the violence Habakkuk sees in 1:2? Is the threat external or internal to Israel/Judah? Who are the righteous and the wicked who appear repeatedly? How are they related to the Chaldeans? Are the Chaldeans going to punish the wicked or are they the wicked? How will the Chaldeans bring about an end to the violence Habakkuk laments? How is the violence Habakkuk decries related to the "violence of Lebanon"? What is the content of the vision on which the prophecy hinges in 2:2? How long will Habakkuk and his people see and endure violence? In spite of his questions and in spite of God's responses, neither Habakkuk nor the reader gets clear answers, if any, to these questions.

The character Habakkuk lives beyond this brief book. He appears in Bel (and the Dragon) in verses 1, 33-39 as the son of Jesus of the tribe of Levi, sent by God to comfort and strengthen Daniel with his own supper in the lions' den. He appears in the pseudepigrapha in *Lives of the Prophets* as a contemporary of Daniel but as a Simeonite. In Zohar A 7b, the rabbis date him to the time of Manasseh and as the Shunammite woman's son from 2 Kings 4.[9] Church Fathers associate Habakkuk with Daniel and Jonah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel.[10] His name in Hebrew, *Havaquq*, and Greek, *Hambakoum*, reflect a likely Akkadian origin for his name, *Habbaququ/Hambaququ*, a type of flora, possibly a type of basil (*HALOT*) or a fruit tree (*CAD*). The Akkadian provenance of Habakkuk's name provides little help with the dating of the book.

The text of Habakkuk received significant attention from the Qumran community, which produced the Habakkuk *Pesher* (1QpHab), a specialized biblical commentary genre, on Habakkuk 1:1–2:20. In the *pesher*, the vagueness of the biblical text is remedied and redressed with contemporary issues and concerns of the community from the first century BCE. Its adoption by the community presages its subsequent popularity as one of the better known prophets in the Book of the Twelve. Conversely, Habakkuk has a modest footprint in rabbinic literature, single mentions

9. That identification is made based on the similarity between Habakkuk, חבקוק, and the verb חבק, "to embrace." Elisha's promise is that she will "embrace," חבקת, a son.

10. Marvin A. Sweeney. "Habakkuk, Book of," *ABD*, 3:1.

in *Bavli Sotah* 49a and *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 8:15, and more extensive conversations in the Zohar.[11] Habakkuk became more legendary in *Seder Olam Rabbah* and the *Lives of the Prophets*, and, in recent years, the book inspired authors outside of biblical studies, including Harriet Beecher Stowe.[12] Liturgically, Habakkuk 3 is read as the *haftarah* on the second day of Shavuoth (Pentecost), and Habakkuk 1:1-4 and 2:1-4 are read together twice in Ordinary Time during Year C of the Revised Common Lectionary with a rich history in the early and medieval church.[13]

11. See Zohar A 7b, B 44a, and C 195a.

12. Richard Coggins and Jin H. Han, *Six Minor Prophets through the Centuries: Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi* (New York: Wiley & Sons, 2011), 37–39.

13. Ibid., 48–49.

Habakkuk 1:1–2:6

The Prophet Who Talks Back and the God Who Hears

Superscription (Hab 1:1)

Habakkuk is a "burden"-bearing prophet; his prophetic work is categorized as a משא, like the prophecies of Isaiah, Ezekiel, Nahum, Zechariah, Malachi, and the words of King Lemmuel's mother preserved as Proverbs 31. He "envisions,"[1] חזה, his proclamations like Isaiah, Amos, Obadiah, Micah, and Nahum. The framing of the superscription infers the entire book could be regarded as the fruit of Habakkuk's envisioning, while 2:2-3 makes reference to a specific "vision," חזון, whose content is not clear. The JPS often translates חזון simply as "prophecy."[2] The most common prophetic formulae, "Thus/So says God" and "an utterance of God," do not occur in the text. The third

1. This vision-based prophecy is distinct from sight-based prophecy articulated with the verb ראה, "to see"; i.e., Isaiah sees God in 6:1 but envisions his prophecies (Isa 1:1; 2:1; 13:1). The cognates of משא refer to both bearing burdens and oracular prophetic utterances.

2. Use of "prophecy" versus "vision" is inconsistent in the JPS. See 1 Sam 3:1; Jer 14:14; 23:16; Obad 1:1; Mic 3:6; Nah 1:1; Hab 2:2-3. Compare Isa 1:1 with 29:7 and see Ezek 7:13, 26; 12:22-24, 27; 13:16; and Hos 12:11.

Habakkuk 1:1

1:1The oracle that the prophet
Habakkuk saw.

chapter has its own superscription, which allows one to understand 1:1 as pertaining solely to chapters 1–2.

Since his prophecy has been presented as חזון . . . חזה, "envisioning . . . a vision," and he does not say he has "seen" or "gazed" upon God as Moses (ראה and נבט) and Isaiah did (ראה), the encounter would seem to have happened in a vision-state; yet, no discussion of methodology or technology to induce the state is evident. Either Habakkuk is able to enter the vision-state at will or God responds to his call by granting access. No mention is made of the divine council or any supernatural beings accompanying God. The contents of the prophetic vision accessed through חזה, envisioning, are distinguished from the things Habakkuk "sees" in the natural world, ראה, and those which he "gazes [upon]," נבט, in 1:3.

Habakkuk is actually called a prophet in the book's superscription (like Haggai and Zechariah), which is rare among the prophetic texts. Unlike Isaiah, Jeremiah, Haggai, and Zechariah, he is not called a prophet in the body of the text that bears his name. The text reveals nothing of his origins; the one personal characteristic of the prophet that emerges is his apparent literacy. God directs him to write his prophetic vision in 2:2, and Habakkuk provides performance notes for his psalm. Those notes, one of which opens the psalm in 3:1 and the other of which closes it in 3:19, also include technical language common in psalms. The inclusion of guild-related performance notes raises the possibility Habakkuk was affiliated in some way with the liturgical work of the Jerusalem temple, whose psalms include similar performance guidelines.

Whether or not affiliation with the Jerusalem temple is even a possibility cannot be determined because there are no explicit dating indices in the superscription or body of the work. The mention of the "Chaldeans" in 1:6 is hardly determinative but suggests interpreting the rise of the Babylonians, i.e., Chaldeans, at the behest of God to punish Assyria for its oppression of Israel and Judah. Even if the mention of the Chaldeans is only a literary device, the text assumes a posture of surprise that the Chaldeans are coming. Broadly, the text seems to interpret the rise of the Neo-Babylonian Empire in the seventh century BCE. J. J. M. Roberts convincingly argues that by the time the Babylonians defeat the Egyptians at

Carchemish in 605 BCE their advance would no longer have had shock value.[3] At the same time, the book of Habakkuk seems to articulate a shift in how the Babylonians were perceived before and after the fall of Jerusalem. In one reading the brief text seems to fold time, moving from a powerful Assyria to a powerful Babylon to a declining Babylon within a few chapters, without explicitly naming (all of) the players or key events. If the text dates from Babylon's ascendancy, then the dismantled Assyria can hardly be the threatening "wicked." Egypt before their defeat at Carchemish is a possibility if the wicked are external to Judah.[4] Habakkuk does not even address his audience by name; neither "Israel" nor "Judah" appear in the text to help identify the political context. At best, historical context in Habakkuk is suggestive.

Dialogue (Hab 1:2–2:6)

The book of Habakkuk begins with a dialogue between Habakkuk (and silent observers) and God. With the superscription the text is a performance ready three-part drama:

Narrator:	1:1
Habakkuk:	1:2-4
God:	1:5-11
Habakkuk:	1:12–2:1[5]
God:	2:2-5[6]
Habakkuk:	2:6-8[7]

3. J. J. M. Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 83.

4. Francis I. Anderson, *Habakkuk: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 25 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 168.

5. The breaks around 1:15-17 in the NRSV unnecessarily separate it from the rest of Habakkuk's speech here.

6. I have chosen not to break the unit at v. 9 following the Masoretic major break פ in order give Habakkuk all of the "woe" prophecies. Most scholars agree the "woe" prophecies belong to Habakkuk even though the transition from God's speech to Habakkuk's is not clearly marked. (The MT has two forms that indicate the end of a passage: a soft break marked with a ס and a hard break indicated by a פ. The relevant marker, ס or פ, most often comes at the end of the line.)

7. Habakkuk 2:6-8 simultaneously concludes the opening dialogue and transitions to the woe prophecies without a clear demarcation.

Zephaniah

Author's Introduction

A Cataclysm Is Coming: Where You Gonna Run?

Zephaniah's[1] brief three chapters begin with what looks like the end of the world, and then they move to the salvation of a faithful remnant at the book's conclusion. The language and imagery of the book of Zephaniah is strong, cataclysmic, apocalyptic, and eschatological. Divine judgment is one of the major themes presented under the rubric of *the day of YHWH*,[2] a motif that pervades the prophetic corpus and extends beyond it.[3] Articulation of the day varies, and multiple formulae of this

1. As is the case with most prophetic books, the same name refers to the book and the prophet in whose name the book is offered, even when the final form of the book is the result of a later author or redactor.

2. The traditional rendering of יום יהוה is "the day of the LORD." In most places for simplicity I use "God" to render YHWH rather than "LORD," as does the NRSV, to resist explicitly gendering the deity, and I use "GOD" when quoting biblical texts with יהוה in keeping with conventions for rendering the Tetragrammaton. I will, however, use the expression "day of YHWH" to avoid the gender implications of NRSV's "day of the LORD" and because the day is particular to Israel's God addressed as YHWH and not associated with other divine names or titles in the Hebrew Bible.

3. The expression also occurs in Mal 4:5 as well as in the New Testament: 1 Cor 5:5; 2 Cor 1:14; 1 Thess 5:2; 2 Thess 2:2; 2 Pet 3:10.

"day" appear throughout the Hebrew canon, inclusive of the book of Zephaniah. Sometimes the motif is just "the day"; other times it is "that day." In Zephaniah the day of YHWH is a day of retribution. The book is characterized by extremes. On the one hand, it proclaims that all the earth will be destroyed; on the other hand, it announces that a remnant shall survive. God is highly anthropomorphized in the text: "I will stretch out my hand" (1:4); "I will search Jerusalem with lamps" (1:12); "God will stretch out God's hand" (2:13); and "I will rise as a witness" (3:8). For those who survive, Zephaniah offers words of restoration and comfort. The book is, in a word, dramatic.

Zephaniah is one of the few prophetic books that introduces its author/speaker, its geographical setting, and its temporal context. These three elements in particular differentiate Zephaniah from the books of Nahum and Habakkuk, with which Zephaniah is often bundled. The book is set in the days of Josiah the reformer, making the prophet Zephaniah a contemporary of Huldah, Josiah's court prophet. Unlike Huldah, Zephaniah does not serve or address the king. Whether or not Zephaniah was even acquainted with the monarch, whose rule frames his prophecies as presented, cannot be ascertained. The content of Zephaniah, however, particularly the polemic against foreign and syncretistic worship, is broadly supportive of Josiah's reform.

Zephaniah's proclamations address Jerusalem and Judah, Israel and Zion (Zeph 1:4; 3:14), with Zephaniah naming specific neighborhoods in Jerusalem (Zeph 1:10-11). Zephaniah also addresses the four Philistine cities: Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, and Ekron (Zeph 2:4), along with a number of other nations with whom Israel/Judah has been in conflict: the Cherethites or Cretans and Canaan, which is characterized as a Philistine holding in Zephaniah 2:5; Moab and Ammon in Zephaniah 2:8-9; Nubia (biblical Cush) in Zephaniah 2:12; and Nineveh and Assyria in Zephaniah 2:13.

Contact between Zephaniah and a number of Hebrew Bible texts, far beyond the day of YHWH motif, is considerable. Adele Berlin has identified an impressive list of shared language and imagery with repeated elements between Zephaniah and Genesis, Deuteronomy, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Micah, and Habakkuk that is exclusive of day of YHWH material.[4] The most significant contact between Zephaniah and other biblical literature is with other prophetic books, most notably Isaiah, Jeremiah, and, to a lesser degree, Micah. It

4. Adele Berlin, *Zephaniah*, AB 25A (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 15–16.

cannot be determined whether the shared material between Isaiah and Zephaniah originates with one or the other prophet, due in part to the multistage formation of the book of Isaiah. Significant overlap also occurs between Zephaniah and Genesis. That intertextuality ranges from quotes, e.g., Isaiah 47:8 and Zephaniah 2:15,[5] and allusions such as Isaiah 1:15/Zephaniah 1:1 and Isaiah 34:12-16/Zephaniah 2:13-15, to thematic sampling such as creation elements being swept away in Zephaniah 1, an event that represents an undoing of Genesis 1–2.

Feminist interest in Zephaniah has often focused on the expression בת ציון, which can be translated as either "Daughter Zion" or "[the] Daughter of Zion." (I explore this point in the Translation Matters section on pp. 188–89 and in the Contextual Hermeneutics section.) Zephaniah offers many more areas for womanist and feminist exploration. As is the case for many biblical texts, under the skin of the narrative are women and girls who are rendered invisible in the text. Making visible the women and girls submerged in the text prompts more questions. For example, how might royal women and their daughters have participated in the activities for which the "king's children," traditionally translated as the "king's sons," are condemned in 1:8?[6] Did women participate in the censured worship of Baal and Milcom referred to in 1:4-5? Since the superscription roots Zephaniah in a historical context that is shared with other biblical literature, the fate of women who are present for or affected by the events described are another area of exploration. The issue of female characters from texts set in the same period and location also invites questions. For example, did the prophets Huldah and Zephaniah have any contact with each other? The intersection of race (or ethnicity in the biblical text) and gender is a particular place of feminist inquiry, but intersectionality is the lived reality of womanist biblical scholars, making Zephaniah's genealogy a fruitful field for womanist inquiry.

The text of Zephaniah varies significantly across the MT, LXX, Targum, Peshitta, and Vulgate. The pronouncements of Zephaniah are full of wordplay, puns, alliteration, assonance, double entendre, and a fair number of obscure expressions rendered in quite diverse ways across

5. Examples of intertextuality include "I am, and there is no one besides me" in both Isa 47:8 and Zeph 2:15: אני ואפסי עוד. Further, in Isa 45:22, אני־אל ואין עוד, "I am God and there is none other," and Isa 46:9, אנכי אל ואין עוד אלהים ואפס, "I am God and there is none other, I am God and there is no one like me."

6. The same expression, בני המלך, can mean "king's sons" or "king's children." I chose to read it as inclusive since no textual reason exists to limit the reference to one gender.

the ancient versions, though versification is largely consistent across the versions. The singular exception is LXX 3:1 which is 2:15 in the MT, DSS, Targum, Peshitta, and Vulgate. Zephaniah is well represented among the Dead Sea finds.[7] In addition, Zephaniah spawned at least two now fragmentary commentaries or *pesharim* on Zephaniah from caves 1 and 4: 1QpZephaniah 1:18–2:2 and 4QpZephaniah 1:12-13 at Qumran. Also in existence is a fragmentary fourth-century Coptic *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*, some or all of which was known to Clement.[8]

I have divided Zephaniah's proclamations into six prophecies.[9] I rely largely on the ס breaks[10] in the Masoretic Text:

I. Superscription 1:1
II. Prophecy 1: Zephaniah 1:2-9
III. Prophecy 2: Zephaniah 1:10-18
IV. Prophecy 3: Zephaniah 2:1-3[11]
V. Prophecy 4: Zephaniah 2:4-15
VI. Prophecy 5: Zephaniah 3:1-13
VII. Prophecy 6: Zephaniah 3:14-20

7. A number of scrolls and fragments of the Twelve come from cave 4: 4QXII^{b} (Zeph 1:2; 2:13-15; 3:19), 4QXII^{c} (Zeph 2:15), 4QXII^{e} (Zeph 1:4-6, 9-10, 13-14; 2:10-14; 3:4–4:4; 5:8; 8:3-4, 6-7; 12:7-12), and 4QXII^{g} (Zeph 3:3-5). Additionally, a scroll of the Twelve exists from Muraba'at, MurXII. This scroll contains Zeph 1:1; 1:11–3:6; 3:8-20. These Hebrew traditions are largely congruent with the Masoretic Text (MT). In existence is also a Greek manuscript that includes Zephaniah from Nahal Hever, 8HevXIIgr with Zeph 1:1-6, 13-18; 2:9-10; 3:6-7.

8. See *Stromateis* 5.11.77.

9. I am using "proclamations" to describe the content of Zephaniah and "prophecies" to describe discrete prophetic units within the book.

10. In the MT individual passages are delineated with a soft break marked with a ס and a hard break indicated by a פ, most often at the end of a verse.

11. Though the ס break follows Zeph 2:4, I am breaking the text at v. 3 because the proclamation against the Philistine cities fits better with the proclamations against foreign nations in 2:5-15.

Zephaniah 1:1-9

Zephaniah and the Day of YHWH: Sea, Won't You Hide Me?

Superscription (Zeph 1:1)

The elements of Zephaniah's superscription require significant discussion. The name Zephaniah likely means "hidden," "secreted," or "treasured" by YHWH as in the hiding of Moses, which uses the same verb, צפן, in Exodus 2:2. The name is well represented in seals and seal impressions (*bullae*) primarily from the sixth to eighth centuries BCE; the *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (*DCH*) identifies fifteen of these seals.[1] The prophet Zephaniah is not attested in other biblical literature; however, in the Hebrew Scriptures, the name Zephaniah is shared by three or four persons, all of whom are associated with Jerusalem:

1) Zephaniah ben Tahath was a Kohathite psalmist (1 Chr 6:36 [1 Chr 6:21 MT]).[2]

1. David J. A. Clines, ed., *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, vol. צ־ר (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2011), 152.

2. Someone else is identified as ben Tahath in 1 Chr 6:24 (1 Chr 6:9 MT).

Zephaniah 1:1

1:1The word of the LORD that came to Zephaniah son of Cushi son of Gedaliah son of Amariah son of Hezekiah, in the days of King Josiah son of Amon of Judah.

2) Zephaniah ben Maaseiah was the second-ranked priest in the temple hierarchy at the time of the Babylonian exile (Jer 52:24-27 and 2 Kgs 25:18-21).
3) Josiah ben Zephaniah functions as a makeshift treasurer in Zechariah 6:10-14. His father, Zephaniah, is not further identified.[3]
4) Zephaniah ben Cushi ben Gedaliah ben Amariah ben Hezekiah is the prophet to whom the book that bears his name is attributed.

The form of the superscription in Zephaniah is a common formula, duplicated in the respective first verses of Hosea and Micah: "The word of GOD that came[4] to [PN][5] in the days of [monarch's PN] of [monarchy]." Amos's superscription deviates slightly from the pattern; it incorporates his shepherding context in Tekoa. Joel and Jonah have abbreviated forms that omit the personal names of the relevant monarchs. Jeremiah has multiple superscriptions that vary the end of the form to add a specific context: "concerning the drought" (14:1), "concerning the nations" (46:1), "concerning the Philistines before Pharaoh struck Gaza" (47:1), and "concerning Elam, at the beginning of the reign of King Zedekiah of Judah" (49:34).

The vast bulk of Zephaniah's superscription is the disclosure of the prophet Zephaniah's identity. Zephaniah's genealogy is fifteen out of the superscription's twenty words in Hebrew. Zephaniah's five-generation pedigree is by far the longest of the prophetic genealogies.[6] According

3. John Berridge considers the Zephaniah in Zech 6 to be the father of Josiah and offers the possibility that he may be the same person as Zephaniah ben Maaseiah in Jer 52:24-27 and 2 Kgs 25:18-21; see "Zephaniah," *ABD*, 6:1075.

4. The phrase דבר־יחוה אשר היה אל is literally "the word of YHWH that happened to X," suggesting a multisensory encounter with the word rather than the traditional "the word of the YHWH came to X."

5. Hosea's PN (personal name) includes genealogy; Micah's does not. Micah's genealogy includes a geographic reference; Hosea's genealogy does not.

6. Of the fifteen prophets with books attributed to them in the Hebrew Bible, seven are presented as "Name *ben* X." The rest have no genealogy but only occasional references to homeland or other descriptive information. The fifteen Latter Prophets are

to the text, Zephaniah's ancestors are: his father Cushi, his grandfather Gedaliah, his great-grandfather Amariah, and his great-great-grandfather Hezekiah, *if* the genealogy contains no gaps. The second and fifth names, Cushi and Hezekiah, have provoked the most scholarly investigation. The length and composition of the genealogy is the subject of much scholarly speculation. A common but not universally accepted understanding is that the genealogy stretches back to King Hezekiah of Judah, reading the otherwise uncharacterized "Hezekiah" as the venerated monarch and the lengthy genealogy as a disclosure of Zephaniah's noble heritage. Alternative interpretations consider the length of the genealogy an attempt to legitimize Zephaniah because of his father's name and what they imagine it reveals. In those arguments (see below) Hezekiah is either the monarch or non-royal Israelite or Judean with the same culturally significant name. As is common in the prophetic books, Zephaniah is not called a prophet in the work credited to him.[7]

Zephaniah ben Cushi

Zephaniah is the son or descendant[8] of a person identified as Cushi, a name that evokes the ancient African nation of Nubia called Kush/Cush in the Hebrew Bible. This area corresponds with parts of contemporary Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia. Likewise, according to the legendary genealogy in Genesis 10:6-20, Cush, כוש, is the ancestor of peoples in North, East, and Central Africa, Mesopotamia, and Canaan. Cush will come to be identified with ancient Ethiopia via its translation as Αἰθιοπία, *Aithiopia*, in the Greek-speaking world. The LXX simply transliterates Cush as Χους more frequently[9] than it translates it as Αἰθιοπία, Ethiopia.[10] The etymology of the Greek term Αἰθιοπία, Ethiopia, "burnt face,"[11] seems

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Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve (Minor Prophets). Daniel, though grouped with the prophets in the LXX and Christian Bibles that are based on the LXX, is placed with the Writings in the Hebrew Bible.

7. Only Habakkuk, Haggai, and Zechariah are called prophets in the superscriptions to their books.

8. Whether or not names in a genealogy represent only the space of a single generation is uncertain. Some genealogical formulae intentionally skip generations as in the case of "son of David."

9. Gen 10:6-8; 2 Sam 18:21-23, 31-32; 1 Chr 1:8-10.

10. Gen 2:13; Num 12:1; Hab 3:7.

11. Αἰθίοψ stems from αἴθω, "burned," and ὄψ, "face," therefore "swarthy face" (*Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*), "blackamoor" (*Strong's Greek Lexicon*), and "burnt-face" and "negro" (Lidell and Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English*

Index of Subjects