



# BOOK OF NAHUM

The Oracle of Nineveh

“Behold, on the mountains the feet of him who brings good tidings,  
who proclaims peace! ...” -Nahum 1:15a



# Introduction to Book of Nahum

## Authorship

Nahum is the author of the book. His name means “consolation”, or “comfort”. Not much is known about Nahum. His birthplace was Elkosh (1:1). It is, however, uncertain as to the location of the city. Since he wrote after the Assyrian captivity, it is assumed the city to be in Judah.

## Date of Composition

Nahum mentions the fall of Thebes (3:8). This event occurred in 663 BC. Therefore, the book could not have been written any earlier. The destruction of Nineveh occurred in 612 BC. Therefore, the book had to be written prior to the event. The most common belief is around 620 BC during the reforms of Josiah.

“The book was written while Assyria was still the most powerful nation in the ancient Near East – as it had been for about two hundred years.” (Roper, 237) Assyria was later defeated by Babylon and the Medes in 612 BC.

## Message and Purpose of the Writing

The message is that the city of Nineveh will be destroyed. The prophet Nahum goes into vivid detail about the certain destruction. However, he does not spend a lot of time with the reason for their destruction. He touches upon the subject in chapter 3 verses 1-4.

Nahum stated that the destruction of the city would bring comfort to others. He states that no one would grieve for the loss of the city -cf. (3:5-7, 19).

The message itself was intended for the people of God rather than trying to encourage Nineveh to repent. The people of God would take great comfort in knowing that their enemy would soon be destroyed for all their wickedness.

God is love (1Jn 4:8). However, the act of a loving God at times calls for vengeance against those who oppress and abuse His people. (cf. Ro 12:19; De 32:35)

# Outline of Book of Nahum

- I. **GOD'S WRATH IS KINDLED -1:1-15**
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- III. **GOD'S WRATH BRINGS WOE -3:1-19**
  - A. WOE FOR THEIR VIOLENCE AND HARLOTRIES -3:1-7
  - B. WOE FOR THEY ARE NO BETTER THAN OTHERS -3:8-11
  - C. WOE FOR THEY HAVE NO PROTECTION -3:12-19

**I. GOD'S WRATH IS KINDLED -1:1-15**

**A. INTRODUCTION -1:1**

1. The book is a “burden” or “oracle” against Nineveh.
2. Nahum identifies himself as the prophet and author of the book.
3. He is an “Elkoshite”. The location of Elkosh is not known.
4. Nahum identifies his writing as a “book”.
  - a. This is unique to the prophet Nahum.
  - b. It could be that his prophecy was in written form rather than preached orally.

**B. THE POWER OF THE LORD -1:2-8**

1. God is jealous and the avenger of His people -vs. 2, 3
  - a. This is not jealous in the sense of envious of another.
  - b. When God is jealous for His people, He protects them.
    - 1) He does not share His people with false gods –(Ex 20:5; 34:14; De 4:24; 5:9)
    - 2) In our context, God does not want His people oppressed, nor abused.
    - 3) This is comparable to a husband / wife relationship. The husband does not share his wife with anyone else, nor does he approve of any harm coming to her.
  - c. God is slow to anger, but does punish the guilty
    - 1) God gave them opportunity to repent at the preaching of Jonah.
    - 2) Their repentance, however, did not last. Now destruction was coming.
2. The power of the Lord poetically expressed -vs. 3b-5

- a. God's power over nature is clearly visualized.
- b. If nature cannot stand before God, who then is sinful man?
- 3. The Lord is good to those who trust in Him -vs. 7
  - a. The Lord earlier relented from the disaster He was going to bring upon Nineveh because they had repented.
  - b. God continues to be a stronghold to all who place their trust in Him
- 4. The Lord is against those who do evil -vs. 8
  - a. Since Nineveh returned to the wicked ways, God would bring destruction upon them.
  - b. Their destruction would come through Babylon and the Medes 612 BC.

#### C. THE VENGEANCE OF THE LORD-1:9-15

- 1. The enemies are addressed -vs. 9-12a
  - a. Whatever they plot against the people of God, it will not come to fruition.
  - b. The enemies of God would be “tangled like thorns”, drunken like drunkards”, and “devoured like stubble fully dried” (vs. 9b-10). All of these show the worthlessness of their efforts against God and His people.
  - c. “The wicked counselor” -vs. 11
    - 1) This most likely references the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal who brought king Manasseh into captivity (2Chr. 33:11-13).
    - 2) This view seems to be supported by verse 15 which states that “the wicked one shall no more pass through you”. “After Manasseh’s captivity, the Assyrians did not come against Judah again.” (Roper, 250).
- 2. The people of God are addressed -vs. 12b-13

- a. The affliction of God's people would be alleviated.
- b. During this time, they were required to be heavy tribute to the Assyrians. This yoke would soon be broken!
3. The enemies of God are addressed -vs. 14
  - a. This seems to be directed at the king of Nineveh.
  - b. Because of his wicked ways, his name would be cut off.
  - c. It was his desire and prayer to his gods that his name would be memorialized with inscriptions on his buildings. God would not allow this.
  - d. King Sin-shar-ishkeen (Esarhaddon II) was the last Assyrian king to reign in Nineveh. According to historians, when he saw that Nineveh was doomed to destruction, he took his wives, concubines, children and servants into the palace and ignited it on fire. They all perished in the fire.
4. The people of God are addressed -vs. 15
  - a. The prophet Nahum is bringing good news of peace.
  - b. Judah will be able to keep their appointed feast to God without interference.
  - c. The wicked one (vs. 11) will no longer oppress them. Nineveh will be no more. "So complete was the destruction that the site of Nineveh was not identified until A.D. 1845." (Roper, 239)
  - d. There is a New Testament reference -Romans 10:15
    - 1) Sin is what puts man in bondage today – Jn 8:34; Ro 6:16, 23



- 2) The gospel sets man free. This is our message to the world!

## II. GOD'S WRATH BRINGS DESTRUCTION -2:1-13

### A. DESTRUCTION OF THE MIGHTY -2:1-7

1. Curses and blessings pronounced -vs. 1, 2
  - a. Nineveh is alerted to prepare for battle coming against them.
    - 1) They are to be on their guard, be watchful, be strengthened, and be fortified.
    - 2) This is not without a sense of irony. No matter how prepared they are for battle, it will not be of any benefit to them.
  - b. God's people will be restored to their former glory.
    - 1) This is reminiscent of the days of king David and king Solomon.
    - 2) The "vine branches" represent their prosperity and joy.
2. Nineveh under attack -vs. 3-7
  - a. The Babylonian army is coming against them.
  - b. The mighty men are made red. The red could reference the color of the Babylonian war clothing or the blood they would shed.
  - c. They are coming with brilliant chariots so powerful opposition would be lacking.
  - d. The enemy gained entry through the river gates -vs. 6
    - 1) Some take this to be a literal interpretation as seen in the comment below.

An ancient historian (Diodorus Siculus) states that due to heavy rainfall and the rise of the rivers Khosr and Tigris, the floodgates were overrun, and a section of the city wall dissolved, enabling the enemy to enter the city. On the basis of Diodorus's statement some have taken the language

literally, implying a literal dissolving of the walls. (Hailey, 261)

- 2) Others believe this to be a figurative statement meaning that God would open the city to an overflowing of the army that would come in and destroy them.
- e. Her people would be carried away into captivity -vs. 7 There was nothing that Nineveh could do against God's decree.

#### B. DESTRUCTION OF THE CITY -2:8-13

1. Nineveh was "like a pool of water" -vs. 8
  - a. That is, it was like a good place to gather.
  - b. When destruction comes upon them, everyone flees. They will not listen to any other instruction telling them to "stop".
2. Nineveh has been emptied -vs. 9, 10
  - a. In the day of destruction, material items lose their value.
  - b. History records that the Medes and Babylonians took away much spoil from Nineveh. They left the city as a worthless heap.
3. Where are the lions? -vs. 11, 12
  - a. Nahum is asking this question with a sarcastic overtone.
  - b. "To describe the people of Nineveh and their disposition to crush and to tear, the prophet uses the lair of a lion family and the lion symbol found on their monuments to impress his lesson..." (Hailey, 263)
  - c. Now it was Nineveh who would be torn apart by their enemies.
4. The Lord is against them -vs. 13

- a. Because of their wickedness, God would utterly destroy them. His hand was against them; therefore, they were powerless to do anything.
- b. If God is for us, no one can stand against us - Ro 8:31
- c. God never leaves us, but we can choose to leave Him. In so doing, we become enemies of His -Ja 4:4

### III. GOD'S WRATH BRINGS WOE -3:1-19

#### A. WOE FOR THEIR VIOLENCE AND HARLOTRIES -3:1-7

1. Nahum begins with a pronouncement of “woe”
  - a. This was a “...word used to mourn for the dead, as at a funeral.” (Roper, 268)
  - b. Simply put, the citizens of the city were as good as dead because of the evil deeds.
  - c. “Indifferent to a moral standard and recognizing no right but might, she had not hesitated to break covenants or to attain her goal by falsehood.” (Hailey, 264)
2. Their wicked treatment of their enemies is described as leaving a great amount of the slain - vs. 2, 3.
3. Her seductive harlotries -vs. 4
  - a. Nineveh certainly had its sexual immoral practices.
  - b. In this context, it is believed to reference their seductive ways with other alliances for their own personal gain.
  - c. Essentially, some nations they conquered, others they seduced into an alliance for their own profit.
4. The Lord again states, “I am against you.” -vs. 5

- a. When God is against a nation, there is no one who can deliver them.
  - b. Since they had adopted characteristics of a harlot, God was going to treat them as one by lifting their skirts over their face, making them a disgrace.
5. Nineveh had devastated other nations for a considerable time. Now they would be made to sit in a pool of their own demise.

**B. WOE FOR THEY ARE NO BETTER THAN OTHERS -3:8-11**

1. The city of No-Amon (Thebes) faced destruction.
  - a. It was a well-fortified city.
  - b. It was beside the river (The Nile River). Likewise, Nineveh is located by the Tigris.
2. Thebes had allies to help in time of need. However, currently they were of no value against their enemy.
  - a. They were taken into captivity. Their children were killed. Honorable men were carried away.
  - b. “This Egyptian city fell to the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal in 663 B.C.” (Roper, 273). If they could not escape the Assyrian king, do they believe they could escape the wrath of God?
  - c. They would seek refuge from their enemy but be unable to find any.

**C. WOE FOR THEY HAVE NO PROTECTION -3:12-19**

1. All their fortifications would fail them. The invaders would come upon them mightily.

2. There people would become like women. (ie. They would lose their courage and not have the inward strength to conduct themselves as men.)
3. Their gates would be wide open, making them vulnerable to attack.
4. Nahum tells them to fortify themselves (there could be a touch of irony to his statement, or perhaps a sarcastic overtone) -vs. 14-15a
  - a. Store water for the siege
  - b. Strengthen their fortifications
  - c. Make strong bricks –(None of these things would avail them)
5. Multiplying themselves like locust would not do them any good either.
6. Nineveh is abandoned -vs. 16-18
  - a. Their merchants have deserted them. Although they were many, during their time of judgment, they would flee.
  - b. Their commanders and generals would be of no use to them. Nahum provides imagery of a grasshopper or a locust whose wings and body were cold and stiff. When the sun comes out and warms the grasshopper's body, he flies away. Their commanders and generals do the same.
  - c. Their shepherds sleep and their noblemen rest. They are believed to either be indifferent about all that is happening, or perhaps they sleep meaning they have died. Either interpretation show they are of no help when God's wrath is administered.
7. Nations will rejoice over their destruction -vs. 19
  - a. The evil of Nineveh had affected many nations.
  - b. In the eyes of the world, they would not be missed.

8. Added notes:
  - a. There are only two books in the Old Testament that conclude with a question. One is Nahum and the other is Jonah. Both books written about Nineveh.
  - b. The prophecy of Nahum did come to pass. “It was demolished by Nabopolassar, the father of Nebuchadnezzar, in 612 B.C. The destroyer was destroyed, just as Nahum had predicted.” (Roper, 276)

Conclusion:

1. Nineveh had repented during the days of Jonah but had turned back to their evil ways.
2. God is slow to anger and allowed them time to repent. The time to repent does have an end.
3. The wickedness of Nineveh would be the ultimate cause of their destruction.
4. The overall message of Nahum is one of comfort to the people of God. Nineveh destroyed, but only for a time. God would destroy them causing the world to rejoice.
5. The application for today:
  - a. Sin is what enslaves man today.
  - b. Jesus destroyed sin thus setting man free.
  - c. We, like Nahum, have the opportunity to spread the Good News of Jesus and what He has accomplished for us all upon the cross and through His victory over the grave!

# References

Coy D. Roper, PH.D. (2013) *Truth for Today Commentary: The Minor Prophets 2*. Resource Publications; Searcy, AR

Homer Hailey. (1972) *A Commentary on the Minor Prophets*. Baker Book House; Grand Rapids, MI