

THE BOOK OF NAHUM

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INTRODUCTION

Whilst Jeremiah and Zephaniah were preaching judgment against Judah, the prophet Nahum was preaching judgment against Nineveh who were one of Judah's enemies.

The northern kingdom of Israel was already in Assyrian captivity and Assyria itself was still a world-dominating power. And so, Nahum preaches a very straightforward message which is, 'the fall of Nineveh'.

Most commentators date his message to around 630-612 B.C, this is because in **Nahum 3:8** he mentions Thebes which is in Egypt, and we know that Thebes was destroyed around 663 B.C. by Ashurbanipal.

You will notice that when Nahum speaks about Thebes, he writes about it in the past tense. In other words, it's already been destroyed and so, he uses their example as a warning for the Assyrians.

We also know that Nineveh itself was destroyed in 612 B.C. and you will notice that Nahum writes about it in the future tense.

NAHUM

The name Nahum, means, 'God consoles,' or 'comforter' which in a sense is very appropriate, yes it was bad news for Assyria but his message was intended to bring comfort to all those who were oppressed and afflicted by them, the people of Judah.

We also know that he was a prophet from Elkosh, which is situated in Galilee, we know that he died at the age of forty-five and was buried in his native land. Other than that information, we know nothing else about the Nahum.

BACKGROUND

Back in **Genesis 10:12-22** tells us about Assyria but during the time of writing, the Assyrians had become the world power of the day. Historians tell us that they were the cruellest and brutal, nation around at the time.

There have been many inscriptions found, that boast about a lot of kings who filled lands with the bodies of dead people and how they killed so many soldiers. In these inscriptions, you can clearly see that they tossed their enemies aside like lumps of clay. They had pyramids which were made from human heads. The kings cut off people's hands and nailed them to the wall, they fed dead bodies to the wild dogs. and used human flesh to cover their walls.

Historians tell us that Ashurbanipal enjoyed ripping off people's lips. G. L. Robinson. The Minor Prophets.

As with most world powers, they got to the stage where they thought they were invincible, especially the capital city of Nineveh. The city was surrounded on three sides by water and was built on top of the Tigris River waterway. The walls were 7 ½ miles in circumference and were thick enough for three chariots to go along side by side. It was professor Layard in 1845 who discovered the ancient ruins of Nineveh, now Iran.

We mustn't lose sight of the fact that God actually cared for the Assyrians, God actually used the Assyrians to correct His own people, **Isaiah 10:15**. At one time they actually repented of their ways, **Jonah 3**, and slowly but surely, they had fallen back to their old ways.

The book itself is written like a poem or psalm and when we read through it, we see a great battleground between Assyria and God.

The message in the book is for and all about Assyria.

OUTLINE

Nahum 1 speaks of God's majesty.

Nahum 2 speaks of the city falling.

Nahum 3 speaks of the cause of its fall.

CHAPTER 1

'A prophecy concerning Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite. The LORD is a jealous and avenging God; the LORD takes vengeance and is filled with wrath. The LORD takes vengeance on his foes and vents his wrath against his enemies. The LORD is slow to anger but great in power; the LORD will not leave the guilty unpunished. His way is in the whirlwind and the storm, and clouds are the dust of his feet. He rebukes the sea and dries it up; he makes all the rivers run dry. Bashan and Carmel wither and the blossoms of Lebanon fade. The mountains quake before him and the hills melt away. The earth trembles at his presence, the world and all who live in it. Who can withstand his indignation? Who can endure his fierce anger? His wrath is poured out like fire; the rocks are shattered before him.' Nahum 1:1-6

There's no doubt who Nahum's message was concerning, it's all about doom and gloom for Nineveh, and God was using His prophet to deliver His message.

The KJV begins with the words, 'The burden of Nineveh,' which carries with it the idea of a heavy load. It's the idea that Nineveh's sins have now become such a heavy load that God will no longer allow the city to stand.

'The LORD is jealous' in the sense that He doesn't want to compete with those imaginary gods, who people have created in their own minds so that they can fulfil their own desires. People today still want to worship the created instead of the Creator, **Romans 1:25**, but if we want to know God and His Word, then we must read His Word and closely listen to what He says.

God is the One who is going to take vengeance against the Assyrians, **Romans 12:19**. Yes, He used them to discipline His own people, the Northern Kingdom, at one time, **Habakkuk 1:12-2:1**, the problem was, the Assyrians just saw this as another group of people who they could destroy.

The other problem was that God was going to use Israel to bring about the Saviour of the world and so, He was now going to punish Assyria because of the way they treated His people, and so, still be able to bring the Messiah through Israel.

Oh, if only we can be as slow to anger as God is! God wasn't acting out of impulse, He's been patient with the Assyrians, He's been patient to bring out His eternal plans and purpose with His people, **2 Peter 3:9**.

Just because He's patient doesn't mean He becomes powerless, when God decided to act, He does so with His eternal plan in mind, **Romans 2:3-5**. Here, He's working in the affairs of the Assyrian nation. And make no mistake about it, when God decides to pour out His wrath upon His enemies, His enemies will suffer the consequences and there's no escaping His judgment, **Hebrews 9:27-28**.

Nahum pulls no punches here as He glorifies God's power to avenge. The Assyrians had pride in themselves and thought they were invincible. So, they are being reminded that Someone is stronger than they are and it's Them who is and has control. They're dealing with a God who has power over nature, He had rebuked the seas and the earth trembles at His presence.

No one can withstand His power, God was bringing destruction on them, **Isaiah 10:5ff**. Later we'll read that this is exactly how they treated others, **Nahum 3:10**, and so, now it's time to reap what they have sown. Bashan and Carmel were beautiful, Lebanon was known for strong trees, but Nahum speaks of it as being a wilderness and it's all God's doing.

We know that Nineveh was guilty because God says so on many occasions throughout this book. Coffman writes the following.

'The guilty'. **Nahum 1:3**, are the ones God knows to be guilty.

'God's enemies.' **Nahum 1:8**, are those who have revolted from him.

'Plotters of evil.' **Nahum 1:9 / Nahum 1:11**, are those who plan and execute evil.

'The vile'. **Nahum 1:14**, are they who have sunken into bestiality.

'The wicked,' **Nahum 1:15**, are the vicious and reprobate.

'The plunderers.' **Nahum 2:2**, are the cruel, heartless spoilers.

'The dishonest,' **Nahum 3:1**, are the covenant breakers and thieves.

'The rapacious,' **Nahum 3:1**, are destroyers and exploiters of the innocent.

'The insatiable seekers of gain', **Nahum 3:1**, are grabbers and graspers.

'The harlots.' **Nahum 3:4**, are the pagans, the sensualists, those who will prostitute anything for wicked purposes.

'The betrayers of weaker nations.' **Nahum 3:4**, are the traitors, double-crossers, and deceitful liars.

'The despicable.' **Nahum 3:5ff**, are all of those mentioned above, plus any others of similar character.

'The presumptuous.' **Nahum 3:8**, are they who revel in the conceit that God will not punish them.

'The disseminators of evil'. **Nahum 3:19**, are all of those who form a part of the cancer of wickedness eating at the vitals of the human race.

'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 of Nineveh; he will pursue his foes into the realm of darkness.' **Nahum 1:7-8**

Amidst all the doom and doom there is a message of hope for the individual, it's a message of mercy. God really does care for those who put their trust in Him.

If Nahum's message was heard by the Jews, this would certainly be reminding them not to worry because God always takes care of His own, **Romans 8:28**. He knows who trust Him and those who don't, **John 10:27**.

The reference to 'an overwhelming flood', could be relating to one of two things.

1. It be could relating to the time when Sennacherib's army surrounded Jerusalem and tried to conquer the city.

It was during this time that 185,000 of his soldiers died, **2 Kings 19:35**, and so his plans to conquer the city came to a rapid end, **Nahum 2:5-7 / Isaiah 37:33-34**.

2. Another possibility and probably more accurate is that it's a reference to the wave of armies that were led by the Babylonians that brought an end to Nineveh in 612 B.C.

In all of this, we must remember that Nineveh was the world powerhouse, they were filled with themselves, brutal towards their enemies and thought nobody could bring them down.

The Israelites on the other hand were a very small nation and would have stood absolutely no chance against them, but God was with them and if anyone could and would wipe them off the face of the planet, it was Him.

And when your up against the God of the universe you can be sure there is no hiding place, **Psalm 139:7-8**, nowhere to run from His wrath, **Jeremiah 23:24**.

The rest of the **Nahum 1** basically says, to Nineveh, you had your first warning from Jonah and although you repented, after time, you turned back to your old ways and now it's time for judgment.

‘Whatever they plot against the LORD he will bring to an end; trouble will not come a second time. They will be entangled among thorns and drunk from their wine; they will be consumed like dry stubble. From you, Nineveh, has one come forth who plots evil against the LORD and devises wicked plans.’ **Nahum 1:9-11**

Nahum's message to the Ninevites is getting more personal for them, they obviously thought they could change their ways like they did the first time, they thought that it would happen again, but that simply wasn't going to happen. God's judgement is coming and there's nothing they can do to stop it from happening.

The Ninevites have absolutely no chance of escaping God's wrath, despite them thinking life will go on as normal, **Jeremiah 13:9 / Jeremiah 13:13-14 / Habakkuk 2:5**. Despite their strength and their fortified city and walls, God will burn them up like dry stubble.

WHO IS THE ONE WHO WILL COME FORTH?

Most commentators believe this to be Sennacherib who wanted to conquer Jerusalem and that's simply because the Assyrians saw him as the most powerful king they had. When Sennacherib wanted to destroy Jerusalem during the reign of Hezekiah, **Isaiah 36:16-20**.

God's power over the Assyrian army was too much for them and it only took one angel to kill 185,000 Assyrians in one night, **2 Kings 19:35**. What happened back then was going to happen again to the Assyrians, God will judge them.

‘This is what the LORD says: ‘Although they have allies and are numerous, they will be destroyed and pass away. Although I have afflicted you, Judah, I will afflict you no more. Now I will break their yoke from your neck and tear your shackles away.’ **Nahum 1:12-13**

Here again, we find a message of hope for Judah, the Assyrians won't be able to control you any longer. **2 Kings 18:29-35** tells us that when God passed through the enemy's camp, He destroyed them. Yes, the Israelites would be taken into captivity as slaves, but God over a period of time will destroy their captors.

‘The LORD has given a command concerning you, Nineveh: ‘You will have no descendants to bear your name. I will destroy the images and idols that are in the temple of your gods. I will prepare your grave, for you are vile.’ Look, there on the mountains, the feet of one who brings good news, who proclaims peace! Celebrate your festivals, Judah, and fulfil your vows. No more will the wicked invade you; they will be completely destroyed.’ **Nahum 1:14-15**

Although Nineveh was a great city, its end was coming, as God is going to destroy the city, everything in it and its inhabitants completely. He basically tells them I'm going to be your undertaker, I'm going to be the One who will bury you.

There's no doubt, that there was good news being proclaimed when Sennacherib's army were destroyed, **2 Kings 18**, but here, God is speaking about the destruction of Nineveh in 612 B.C.

Even today, when world leaders who are dictators, fall in war, the whole world celebrates as another ruthless leader becomes no more.

In other words, God's strength is His enemies and they will lose, God will be doing it all through Babylon, **2 Kings 23:29-35**.

It will be time to rejoice when the good news about Nineveh's fall spreads, for Judah it was time to get back to following God and fully committing to His commands.

Paul speaks about the good news in **Romans 10:15** and we find Paul quoting **Isaiah 52:17** and **Isaiah 40:52**, that's the text from which Nahum is quoting.

When Paul quotes this good news, he uses it to speak of our spiritual deliverance from Satan by Jesus, which really is the Gospel, the good news.

APPLICATION

There's good news to be found in the fact that God cares for His people, especially from those who oppose His children. God loves us and knows us, **Ephesians 2:4-7**. He knows what's going on all around us but more importantly, He is in control, **1 Timothy 1:17**.

Nineveh once repented but went back to their old ways, and although God was patient with them, His patience finally ran out.

We must remember that God's grace won't last forever, we must act now in order to be saved, **2 Corinthians 6:2**.

However, we too, like the Assyrians, must be careful not to let our pride get the better of us, **James 4:6-7**.

There are times when we're tempted to become self-sufficient when we look to ourselves for strength and wisdom, **Revelation 3:17**.

CHAPTER 2

'An attacker advances against you, Nineveh. Guard the fortress, watch the road, brace yourselves, marshal all your strength! The LORD will restore the splendour of Jacob like the splendour of Israel, though destroyers have laid them waste and have ruined their vines.' **Nahum 2:1-2**

Chapter 2 describes the impending doom of Nineveh, it's time for them to prepare for the upcoming onslaught. There's nowhere to hide from God's judgement, there's nothing they can do to stop God from pouring out His wrath against them.

Nineveh finally fell when Nabopolassar gathered a group of armies together, from the Medes, Babylonians and the Scythians, it was he who went against the city in 612 B.C.

Although it's not been proven, there are those who believe that a great rainstorm happened two months before which actually washed away a huge portion of the city's wall, **Nahum 1:8**. If this did happen, then this would give us one possibility of how Nabopolassar managed to take the city.

Notice how Nahum writes as though it's already happened, in other words, God is as good as His Word. The fall of Nineveh was significant because this meant that the Northern Kingdom of Israel, who were in Assyrian captivity would soon be freed.

‘The shields of the soldiers are red; the warriors are clad in scarlet. The metal on the chariots flashes on the day they are made ready; the spears of juniper are brandished. The chariots storm through the streets, rushing back and forth through the squares. They look like flaming torches; they dart about like lightning.’ Nahum 2:3-4

This is not good news for the Assyrians, they are going to reap what they sowed. All the cruelty and havoc they created among other nations, was going to happen to them. The shields of those who were to slaughter them were red from the blood they had shed in other battles and the people they had killed.

The metal on the chariots was brightly polished in order to reflect the sun which would blind the enemy. These chariots would have had blades sticking out of their wheels, which meant they would run through the streets of the city causing destruction and slaughter.

‘Nineveh summons her picked troops, yet they stumble on their way. They dash to the city wall; the protective shield is put in place. The river gates are thrown open and the palace collapses. It is decreed that Nineveh be exiled and carried away. Her female slaves moan like doves and beat on their breasts.’ Nahum 2:5-7

Nineveh is going to be taken by surprise which causes them to stumble. The joint armies of Medo-Persians and Babylonians went straight for the walls of the capital city. We can imagine enormous battering rams being set up against the huge walls.

The river gates of the city were diverted so that they could get to the walls and the water pressure would be so great, that it could burst a hole in the city wall.

No wonder they ‘beat their breasts’, they are now sowing what they have reaped for years, they now realise that it’s fertile to rely on their strength, the city walls have fallen and with it went their security.

‘Nineveh is like a pool whose water is draining away. ‘Stop! Stop!’ they cry, but no one turns back. Plunder the silver! Plunder the gold! The supply is endless, the wealth from all its treasures! She is pillaged, plundered, stripped! Hearts melt, knees give way, bodies tremble, every face grows pale.’ Nahum 2:8-10

God had just told them exactly how the city will fall, the river gates will fall open and the city will collapse and as a result, the victorious army will take the spoils of war.

Even though those in command would cry out orders to their soldiers, to stand and fight, no one would, no one would even look back as they were too busy running away in order to save themselves from being murdered.

When Nineveh was finally destroyed, we know that a few of the Assyrian soldiers fled to Carchemish. It was there in 609 B.C. that the Babylonians made a final attack against the Assyrians and the Egyptians who fought together. After the Babylonians defeated them both, this brought an end to their alliance and the end of the Assyrian empire.

All the items which the Assyrians plundered from other nations, were now being taken away from them, they were truly reaping what they had sown.

‘Where now is the lions’ den, the place where they fed their young, where the lion and lioness went, and the cubs, with nothing to fear? The lion killed enough for his cubs and strangled the prey for his mate, filling his lairs with the kill and his dens with the prey. ‘I am against you,’ declares the LORD Almighty. ‘I will burn up your chariots in smoke, and the sword will devour your young lions. I will leave you no prey on the earth. The voices of your messengers will no longer be heard.’ Nahum 2:11-13

Just as Rome had the sign of the eagle, Assyria had the sign of a lion. They thought their source of power was in their chariots but with them gone now, they will have no power.

When the Assyrians went out against other nations, they would bring back the captives to the people who would taunt them, scoff at them and make a laughing stock out of them.

The young lions, who are the children, will be devoured, there will be no prey on earth, which means there will be no food for them. Nineveh has fallen, the Assyrians have fallen, and so, the Assyrians are certainly going to feel the effect, there would be a feeling of hopelessness and helplessness.

This is exactly how they made other nations feel but now it's time for them to reap what they have sown, Matthew 26:52.

APPLICATION

Although Nineveh had received mercy from God in the past, in the days of Jonah, the time for receiving more mercy from God was over for the Assyrians.

They continued to practice evil wherever they went and now it was time for judgment, it was time for them to be on the receiving end of God's wrath.

As Christians, we need to remind ourselves of the mercy we received from God and we must be quick to show that mercy to others, especially to those who hurt us, Luke 6:36-42.

When we sin, we must do what the Nineveh did in the days of Jonah, we must repent, Jonah 3, we must confess our sins to God, otherwise, no forgiveness will be granted to us, 1 John 1:9.

CHAPTER 3

'Woe to the city of blood, full of lies, full of plunder, never without victims! The crack of whips, the clatter of wheels, galloping horses and jolting chariots! Charging cavalry, flashing swords and glittering spears! Many casualties, piles of dead, bodies without number, people stumbling over the corpses—all because of the wanton lust of a prostitute, alluring, the mistress of sorceries, who enslaved nations by her prostitution and peoples by her witchcraft.' Nahum 3:1-4

We can hear the cries, this isn't fair! This is unjust! But, oh how wrong Nineveh was, this judgement was fully deserved and delivered by a very just God. Chapter 3 tells us why God brought judgment upon them.

The city is a city of blood, the Assyrians have brutally murdered many people and so they have blood on their hands. Now it's time to reap what they have sown, what they did to others, God was going to bring upon them.

There's no escaping the fact that the Assyrians were evil and caused havoc wherever they went. All they wanted to do was go to other nations and destroy them and take the spoils for themselves.

Ashurbanipal II had a fearsome reputation, he was well known for skinning some leaders alive and then he would use the skin to cover pillars and walls. He loved nothing more than to cut off the heads of some people and publicly display them on the top of poles. They used all kinds of tactics to ensnare other nations, including prostituting, sorcery and witchcraft.

Now we begin to understand why God poured out His wrath upon these people, they were brutal and ruthless in the way they treated other nations.

'I am against you,' declares the LORD Almighty. 'I will lift your skirts over your face. I will show the nations your nakedness and the kingdoms your shame. I will pelt you with filth, I will treat you with contempt and make you a

spectacle. All who see you will flee from you and say, ‘Nineveh is in ruins—who will mourn for her?’ Where can I find anyone to comfort you?’ Nahum 3:5-7

We can almost feel the embarrassment and shame Nineveh is going to face before the whole world. Nineveh had played the part of a prostitute for years before the nations, and so, it will suffer the shame of a prostitute, Ezekiel 16:37-39 / Hosea 2:3.

It’s not surprising that no other nation would feel sorry for them or comfort them when they were destroyed because those other nations would remember the way they were treated by them.

‘Are you better than Thebes, situated on the Nile, with water around her? The river was her defence, the waters her wall. Cush and Egypt were her boundless strength; Put and Libya were among her allies. Yet she was taken captive and went into exile. Her infants were dashed to pieces at every street corner. Lots were cast for her nobles, and all her great men were put in chains. You too will become drunk; you will go into hiding and seek refuge from the enemy.’
Nahum 3:8-11

Judgement and destruction are inevitable, it’s going to happen and there’s no way back for Nineveh. Although Thebes was the capital of Egypt and heavily populated, it was conquered by Ashurbanipal.

The River Nile was everything to the Egyptians, their whole lives centred around the Nile for religious and domestic reasons. The Nile didn’t help the Egyptians when the Assyrians came against them and so the River Tigris wouldn’t help the Ninevites. If anything, it would actually be the River Tigris which would begin the process of bringing down this great city.

Here again, we’re reminding of the reaping what you sow process, Thebes was a powerful city, but it was brought down by Ashurbanipal, Nineveh was a powerful city and God is going to bring them down. Ashurbanipal took a whole load of treasures from Thebes, and so a whole load of treasures will be taken from Nineveh.

The reference to ‘becoming drunk’ means they will be in total confusion, they will be shocked and bewildered.

‘All your fortresses are like fig trees with their first ripe fruit; when they are shaken, the figs fall into the mouth of the eater. Look at your troops—they are all weaklings. The gates of your land are wide open to your enemies; fire has consumed the bars of your gates. Draw water for the siege, strengthen your defences! Work the clay, tread the mortar, repair the brickwork! There the fire will consume you; the sword will cut you down—they will devour you like a swarm of locusts. Multiply like grasshoppers, multiply like locusts! You have increased the number of your merchants till they are more numerous than the stars in the sky, but like locusts they strip the land and then fly away. Your guards are like locusts, your officials like swarms of locusts that settle in the walls on a cold day—but when the sun appears, they fly away, and no one knows where.’ Nahum 3:12-17

It’s almost like God is mocking the Ninevites, it’s like God is saying ‘oh how powerful you thought you were, but you didn’t think about how powerful I am’.

He tells them first of all, that all the fortresses of Nineveh weren’t powerful enough to stand against God, as they fell very easily. Then He tells them that those who live in Nineveh will be overcome with terror as helpless women, Nahum 3:5.

God tells them to get ready for the coming onslaught, and do everything they can to defend themselves from the oncoming Babylonian army, sadly, this too would be a waste of time, nothing they do will stop them.

God asks them to increase their army, as many as locusts, but locusts don’t function as an army, they hibernate in the winter. The point is that no matter how many soldiers they could gather together to fight, they would have no chance against the army God was sending against them, all will be gone.

As I mentioned earlier those who ran away from Nineveh went to Carchemish, but they were chased and killed by the Babylonians.

‘King of Assyria, your shepherds slumber; your nobles lie down to rest. Your people are scattered on the mountains with no one to gather them. Nothing can heal you; your wound is fatal. All who hear the news about you clap their hands at your fall, for who has not felt your endless cruelty?’ Nahum 3:18-19

Notice that the king’s shepherds are asleep, how could they be sleeping knowing what was going on! They should be awake and fully aware of what’s happening.

Because of the way they treated others, it seems that the other nations loved to hate the Assyrians, as no one would mourn over them when their empire finally came to an end. The only rejoicing which would happen is when the Assyrians finally fell, the other nations would rejoice greatly.

CONCLUSION

All the way through the Book of Nahum, we hear God speaking through him and saying that Assyria as a nation would be destroyed and would never rise again.

We hear Him say that Assyria would reap what they sowed among the other nations. Judgment came upon them as God said, they repented the first time through Jonah’s preaching, [Jonah 3](#), but as a result of going back to their old practices, they felt and experienced the wrath of God and ceased to be a nation.

APPLICATION

As Christians, we are to expect persecution and trouble from those who oppose God and His church, [2 Timothy 3:12](#), but we must remain faithful to God, who promises to protect us and help us in our time of need, [Psalm 27:5](#).

We need to leave those who oppose us in God’s hands, [Luke 18:7-8](#), and trust that He will deal with them appropriately.

The real question we need to ask ourselves is simply this, are we relying on our own strength or are we relying on God and His strength? [Psalm 18:2](#).

‘Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.’ Ephesians 6:10