

Nahum

INTRODUCTION

The kingdom of the Assyrians, with their capital at Nineveh, had been a thriving nation for centuries by the time the prophet Nahum appeared on the scene. Their territory, which changed over the years with the conquests and defeats of various rulers, lay north of Babylonia, between and beyond the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Ancient documents attest the cruelty of the Assyrians against other nations. Assyrian kings boast of their savagery, celebrating the abuse and torture they inflicted on conquered peoples.

In 722-721 B.C., the Assyrians conquered the northern kingdom of Israel. At that time they also severely threatened Judah, the southern kingdom. Only divine intervention prevented the desecration of Jerusalem a few years later in 701 B.C. (see 1 Kings 17-19). Now, over a century later, the empire whose atrocities made the world tremble and who acted as God's instrument against a sinful Israel, teetered on the verge of divine destruction.

The fall of the Assyrian Empire, climaxed by the destruction of the capital city of Nineveh in 612 B.C., is the subject of the prophecy of Nahum. The doom about to descend upon the world's great oppressor is the single occasion for Nahum's pronouncement. Consequently, the prophecy is judicial in style, incorporating ancient "judgment oracles." The language is poetic, forceful, and figurative, underscoring the intensity of the topic with which Nahum wrestles.

While the judgment of Assyria is the overwhelming theme of Nahum, the book is primarily a message of comfort to the people of Judah. News of the destruction of the world's great tyrant would come as welcome relief to people shuddering with apprehension and anxiety. Political bondage was always a theological problem for the people of Israel, because this was one of the curses God had promised for disobedience (Deut. 28:33, 36, 37, 49-52). Release from the terror of Assyrian domination would bring with it a renewed sense of God's good favor. Nahum's two-pronged proclamation of condemnation and comfort is well summarized in 1:7-9. Unfortunately, Judah failed to heed the warning seen in Assyria's fall and the subsequent rise to power of Babylon. She continued in moral rebellion, which would result in her fall to Babylon in 586 B.C.

The Book of Nahum focuses on a single concern: the fall of the city of Nineveh. Three major sections, corresponding to the three chapters, comprise the prophecy. The first describes God's great power and how that power works itself out in the form of protection for the righteous but judgment for the wicked. Though God is never quick to judge, His patience cannot forever be taken for granted. All the Earth is under His control; and when He appears in power, even nature shrinks before Him (1:1-8). In her state of distress and affliction (1:12), Judah could easily doubt God's goodness and even question His power. But the Lord promises to restore peace (1:15), to defeat the enemies of His people (1:13-15), and to remove the threat of renewed affliction (1:9). The prediction of Nineveh's doom forms a message of consolation to Judah (1:15).

The second major section of the prophecy describes the coming destruction of Nineveh (2:1-13). Attempts to defend the city against her attackers will be in vain because the Lord has decreed the fall of Nineveh and the rise of Judah (2:1-7). Floods will inundate the city, sweeping away all the mighty, man-made structures (2:6). Nineveh's citizens will be carried away captive (2:7); others will flee in terror (2:8). Precious treasures will be plundered (2:9); all strength and self-confidence will melt away (2:10). The mighty lion's den will be reduced to desolation, because " 'I am against you,' says the LORD of hosts" (2:11-13).

The third chapter forms the final section of the book. God's judgment may seem overly harsh, but He is justified in His condemnation. Nineveh was a "bloody city" (3:1), a city guilty of shedding the innocent blood of other people. She was a city known for deceit, falsehood, theft, and debauchery (3:1, 4). Such vice was an offense to God, so His verdict of judgment was inevitable (3:2, 3, 5-7). Like No Amon, an Egyptian city that fell despite numerous allies and strong defenses, Nineveh cannot escape divine judgment (3:8-13). All efforts to survive prove futile (3:14, 15). Troops scatter, leaders perish, and the people run for the hills (3:16-18). God's judgment has fallen, and the peoples Assyria once victimized so mercilessly rejoice and celebrate in response to the news (3:19).

(Spirit Filled Life Bible's Introduction to Nahum, Timothy Mark Powell)

Nahum 1:1-15

The repentance of Nineveh which ensued upon the preaching of Jonah was the means of averting its destruction at that time. But soon, as in the case of most sinners, because judgment was not executed speedily, the people of Nineveh returned to their former sins. And now, after 150 years, they proceeded so far in iniquity as to presume to threaten an invasion of the Lord's own land—the same land from which had come the prophet whose ministry had been of old blessed to their repentance and consequent deliverance from judgment. Therefore, justly, God was now "jealous" for His people, and jealous *against* their adversaries. The jealousy of God in behalf of His elect implies the exceeding intensity of His love. It is at once the consideration which may well strike terror into the adversaries of God and of His people, and inspire with confidence and assurance His trusting and praying children.

Though God be "slow to anger" (v. 3), "He will not at all acquit the wicked." Men vainly and perversely turn God's very long-suffering into an occasion for wickedly misrepresenting His character, as though He were insensible to violations of His own holy law, or dilatory and indifferent as to vindicating His own justice and majesty. But Nahum, with awful emphasis, repeats, "The Lord revengeth; the Lord revengeth . . . the Lord will take vengeance on his adversaries" (v. 2). He has given to the transgressor a respite in love, not a reprieve in weakness. "He reserves wrath for his enemies" against His own fit time. When that time shall come, "Who can stand before his indignation? and who"—of the ungodly—"can abide in the fierceness of His anger?"

(Bible Commentary, Jamieson Fausset & Brown)

What two attributes of God does the prophet emphasize?

Nah. 1:2-8

Though the whole context is tossed in tempest where is the island of calm in Nahum's stormy lake?

Nah. 1:7

Compare Nahum 1:12-14 with Isa. 37:36-38

Nahum 2:1-13

The destroying nations which from time to time appear on the stage of the world's history are God's battle-axe wherewith He executes judgment on the guilty (v. 1). After He has employed these nations, as Nineveh and Babylon, for a time to fulfill His purpose, He lays them aside. But in the case of His elect people, as Jacob and Israel, after having inflicted the chastisements in full which were needed for their discipline and correction, He restores them to His favor again (v. 2).

God sees in His own people, because of His own sovereign grace to them, an "excellency" which He sees in no other people. Let us take care that we be among "the excellent, in whom is all God's delight" (Ps. 16:3). So shall He make us, with the true Israel, "an eternal excellency" (Isa. 60:15).

(Bible Commentary, Jamieson Fausset & Brown)

Is their any hearing of Nineveh today proving the prophecy of Nahum in 2:13 true?

Nahum 3:1-19

How vain are all the defenses of sinners when the Lord is against them! No-Amon or Thebes was one of the grandest and most magnificent cities of the earliest ages. Yet her rampart and sea wall, with her seemingly "infinite strength," were of no avail to save her "young children" from being "dashed in pieces" and "all her great men" from being "bound in chains" (vv. 8-10). Such was to be the doom of Nineveh likewise. God acts on the same unchanging principle in all ages, and in the case of all nations. Unrighteousness towards man, and impiety and idolatry towards God, bear the same bitter fruits everywhere, however for a time transgressors may seem to prosper. Let us as a nation remember that our safety consists not in our fleets and armies, nor even in the "multiplication of our merchants above the stars of heaven" (v. 16). "Riches," like the "canker-worm" (v. 16), or the "great grasshoppers" (v. 17), "certainly make themselves wings; they fly away" (Prov. 23:5). The "strong-holds" (v. 12) on which we rely would fall before the invader as easily as the ripe fruit "into the mouth of the eater" if God were against us (v. 12).

(Bible Commentary, Jamieson Fausset & Brown)

What was the chief reason why the "Lord of hosts" declared, "Behold I am against thee; and I will show the nations your nakedness, and the kingdoms your shame" (Nahum 3:5)?

Compare the reaction of the people when Ninevah is destroyed (Nahum 3:19) with that of the fall of Babylon in Revelation 19:1-10.