

**Text:** Nahum 1

**Title:** Introduction to Nahum

**Truth:** God's character is demonstrated in judgment.

**Date/Location:** Wednesday May 6, 2015 and Sunday July 24, 2022 at FBC

## Introduction

Read chapter 1. The book of Nahum is addressed to Nineveh and also to the entire Assyrian empire of which Nineveh was the capital city.

According to Wikipedia, Nineveh was “an ancient Mesopotamian city on the eastern bank of the Tigris River, and capital of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. It was the largest city in the world for some fifty years until, after a bitter period of civil war in Assyria itself, it was sacked by an unusual coalition of former subject peoples, the Babylonians, Medes, Persians, Armenians Chaldeans, Scythians and Cimmerians in 612 BC. Its ruins are across the river from the modern-day major city of Mosul, in the Ninawa Governorate of Iraq.”

### A. Jonah as Background

Before we study Nahum, we have to recall that Jonah was another prophet who was told to bring a message to Nineveh at an earlier time. Jonah was written in the early half of the 8th century B.C. (sometime between 793-752 B.C.).

### B. Date of the Nahum's Book

Nahum wrote about 100 years later that judgment is imminent for Nineveh. Apparently their repentance under Jonah's ministry did not last more than a portion of the intervening century.

The date of Nahum can be located between 663 B.C. and 612 B.C. The former date marks the fall of Thebes in Egypt to the Assyrians (3:8) and this is used as an example by Nahum and it is presented as occurring prior to the writing of Nahum. Further, the fall of Nineveh to the Babylonians occurred in 612 B.C. This could put Nahum's writing during the reigns of Manasseh (most likely), Amon, or Josiah. I believe the book was written earlier in that time period due to the apparent remaining strength of

Assyria, which was in the process of being eclipsed in the 7th century by the Babylonians under Nabopolassar and his more famous son Nebuchadnezzar. Later in the century we find a weaker and weaker Assyrian power. Since the last great ruler of Assyria was Ashurbanipal (reigned 668-627 B.C., grandson of Sennacherib), we should date Nahum between 663 B.C. and the end of his reign, 627 B.C. An approximate date of 650 B.C. is useful for purposes of our study.

What other big events occurred around this time? A bit later, in 605 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem and carried captives, including Daniel, to Babylon. Shortly thereafter Buddha taught in India while Confucius did so in China. Greek city states were flourishing around this time.

### C. Nahum Personally

Nahum's name means comfort or consolation. It is a short form of the name Nehemiah. The message is of no comfort to Nineveh, obviously, but is of comfort to Judah, whose enemies will be punished thoroughly.

Nahum is an *Elkoshite* which probably refers to his geographical origin. It is not known for certain where this was located. There are several traditions ranging from north of Mosul in Iraq where there was a village with a similar-sounding name, to somewhere beyond the Jordan to somewhere around Galilee. The latter possibility is attractive because a village name there was Capernaum – "village of Nahum."

Arriving at a precise identification of Nahum's birthplace is of far less importance than the *message* of the prophet.

### D. Some key points about Nineveh

1. Origin: Genesis 10:10-12, with Nimrod starting the cities of Babylon and Nineveh. It was on the Tigris River.
2. During the time of Jonah, Nineveh was a city that had 120,000 young people in it, indicating the population altogether could

have been over half a million souls.<sup>1</sup> Nineveh was not the capital city at this time, but it was a very large and important city. Later, Sennacherib (704-681) made Nineveh the capital.

3. The people of Nineveh were worshippers of the fish goddess Nanshe and fish god Dagon (a “man-mermaid”).
4. The city was seemingly unassailable, with great walls and a moat. One source indicates the wall went 7.5 miles around the main part of the city. In some places, the wall was 148 feet wide. There were 15 gates through the wall providing passage into and out of the city.<sup>2</sup> The moat may have been 150 feet wide and 60 feet deep. Evidently, in February 2015, ISIS terrorists blew up some of the ancient walls which remained after 2700 years.
5. From 740 to 722 B.C., the Assyrians under rulers Sargon II and Shalmeneser destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel and deported many of its survivors.
6. In 701 B.C. Sennacherib invaded Judah but was unable to defeat the southern kingdom. This is because in Isaiah 37:36-38 we read about the death of 185,000 soldiers of the Assyrian army.
7. The kingdom of Assyria recovered somewhat after the huge loss of its army by the time of the writing of Nahum, but not before Sennacherib was assassinated, and his son Esar-haddon reigned. Following his reign, his son Ashurbanipal reigned from 668 to 627 B.C.
8. God promised the destruction of the city and its empire in passages such as Isaiah 30:31, Zephaniah 2:13, Zechariah 10:11, Ezekiel 32:21-22. To do was no problem for God—what seemed impossible to man was nothing to God (Jer. 32:17).  
Furthermore, imagine what it must have been like to receive a message from one of the Hebrew prophets that your kingdom was going to be destroyed. I suppose Ashurbanipal may have considered it boastful talk, but perhaps it gave him some

---

<sup>1</sup> Remember that another interpretation of the 120,000 is that this was the entire population, existing in a morally ignorant state.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/place/Nineveh-ancient-city-Iraq/Outline-of-the-city>

pause...like it did his predecessor who declared a fast and told his people to repent (Jonah 3:7-9).

9. The Tigris overflowed (as it indicates in 1:8) and the walls were compromised such that the Babylonians could invade.

10. The city lay in ruins, undiscovered until 1842.

## **I. Major Themes of the Book of Nahum**

A. The Character of God is emphasized in 1:2-8. Here are some highlights:

1. Jealous, 2a. God is “earnestly committed to a cause.” The cause is His own righteousness, the worship that He is due as over against that given to idols, and His people. The word can also describe someone who is a nationalist, patriot or zealot like Simon the Zealot (Patriot) (Luke 6:15, Acts 1:13).
2. Avenging, 2b-d. Vengeance belongs to God. He knows how to properly apply justice, something difficult for humans to do and, impossible in the matters of eternal recompense. “God is love” is one “side” of His character, but He also is righteous and just, and that requires something more than mere love.
3. Long-suffering, 3a. He does not lose His cool but is very patient. Judging from how long some iniquity has gone on in the world and even in our own lives, God is VERY patient.
4. Righteous – not acquitting wicked people, 3b
5. All powerful, 3c. A short section from 3c-5 mentions His power over nature, and then v. 6 applies that truth to those who think they can endure His wrath. His power will overwhelm them. Particularly after a terrible natural disaster, we stand in awe of the power of nature to kill and destroy in mere moments. Nature in turn stands in awe of the power of God over it. Transitively, we must recognize that God’s power is FAR above ours.

B. An evil plot against God. This plot may well be against God through the nation of Israel. A nation that plots against Israel plots against

God (Zech. 2:8), just like one who persecutes Christians persecutes Christ (Acts 9:4). See 1:9, 11.

C. God's Judgment on Adversaries Generally and of Nineveh Particularly.

1. Generally: 1:2, 3b, 6, 8.

2. Particularly: 1:9-10, 2:1, 2:3-12, and most of chapter 3.

D. The salvation of Israel and those who trust in God. This salvation is physical and material, in contrast to the oppressive devastation wrought by the Assyrians. See 1:7, 1:12b-13, 1:15, and 2:2. Salvation for Israel results from God's judgment against the Assyrians.

MAP

**Text:** Nahum 1

**Title:** Introducing the God of Judgment

**Truth:** God will powerfully judge the Ninevite conspirators.

**Date/Location:** Wednesday May 13, 2015 and Wednesday August 10, 2022 at FBC

## II. Reading/Commentary on Chapter 1

A. Introduction, 1:1. Nahum is introduced in two ways.

1. First, it is a burden. It is a "heavy message" or "pronouncement." He has "heavy news" for the city of Nineveh.

2. Second, it is a vision. God conveyed the revelation to Nahum largely through picture or sight in his mind, and he wrote it down. The vivid descriptions of events draw the reader into his vision.

3. The message against Nineveh would be a long-awaited and very welcomed message from God to the people of the southern kingdom of Judah who had felt the oppression and knew the fear of the Assyrians. It would still be up to several decades before the prophecy was fulfilled.

B. God in the Book of Nahum, 1:2-8.

1. God's wrath, 1:2-3b. This is not like the picture of the love-only "god" that is preached so widely today. That god is not the true God of the universe. Look even in the New Testament and see: Romans 1:18, 2:5, 3:5, 9:22; Eph. 5:6; Col. 3:6; Revelation 14:10, 19; 15:1, 7; 16:1, 19; 19:15. How can there be any question that God exercises wrath against sin?
  2. God's power in nature, 1:3c-5. God is over the earthquakes and every other natural evil or disaster that happens in the world. He can redirect the largest river, remove a huge swath of land into the ocean, flatten mountains, send tornados or withhold them, etc.
  3. God's judgment, 1:6, 8. In these two verses, Nahum declares that God will overwhelm His enemies. This judgment is pictured as natural forces like fire, avalanche, flood, and darkness which overtake people and consume them. No one can resist such forces, and even more, no one can resist the judgment of God. In this way, the wrath of God is combined with the power of God over nature and directed against the wicked.
  4. God's goodness to those who trust Him, 1:7. This is where the refreshment comes in for the people of God.
- C. God's Judgment Against Nineveh
1. The people of Assyria have made a conspiracy against God, 1:9, 11. How do they conspire against God? They are completely given over to idolatry. They have destroyed much of God's creation. They have oppressed the nation of Israel. They were instruments used by God in judgment, but now they would themselves face His judgment because of their evil. They could not cleverly figure out a way out of God's intended end for them. Among them was one who was a wicked counselor, a counselor of Belial—a satanic king. See Isaiah 10:5-16, which appears to refer to Sennacherib.
  2. The judgment against many, v. 10, 12a. There will not be safety in numbers. In fact, they will be consumed like dry stubble burned in a fire. The drunkenness could refer to literal

intoxication, but it could refer to drinking the wrath of God (see 3:11).

3. Relief for the afflicted, v. 12b-13. This is an ongoing little motif throughout the book, that God will give relief to those Israelites who were oppressed by Assyria.
4. Thorough judgment, v. 14.
  - a. Name is snuffed out: no more descendants. This could be specifically of the king himself, or of the nation of which he is representative head.
  - b. Idols cut off: Dagon and others are destroyed
  - c. The king killed: this is the ominous reference within the words “I will dig your grave.”All of this is because the man was vile. What a pronouncement!
5. Good news, v. 15. Here the news of Assyria’s destruction reaches Judah and gives them a season of rest in in which they can enjoy peace and keep their religious festivals without fear of attack and oppression. This echoes the good news report of Isaiah in 52:4-7. Apostle Paul uses this in Romans 10:15 to reflect the proclamation of the good news of the gospel, which not only will ultimately cause violence to cease in the universe when the Lord returns, but also brings enemy sinners into reconciliation with God, saving them from His utmost wrath.

MAP

**Text:** Nahum 2

**Title:** I am Against You!

**Truth:** The judgment against Nineveh is detailed and the city is mocked.

**Date/Location:** Wednesday May 20, 2015 and Wednesday August 10, 2022 at FBC

### III. Reading/Commentary on Chapter 2

#### A. Description of Nineveh’s Fall in Battle

1. Verse 1: Call to Defend the city
2. Verse 2: Promise to restore Israel as a nation, from the destruction of Assyria which had devastated them for years.

3. Verses 3-4: Vivid picture of the attack against the city. The action is heavy, and colorful because of the armor and clothing of the soldiers. They could be red in color because of much blood, or they could have made them with scarlet fabric and gleaming and red shields to be more fierce looking or to hide the stains of blood.
4. Verse 5: The scene switches back to the defenders, including the nobles of the city who hastily prepare to defend in the battle. MacArthur writes that Greek historian Diodorus Siculus said there were as many as 1,500 defensive towers in the city of Nineveh, as high as 200 feet tall.
5. Verse 6: The attackers were assisted by a natural force: flooding water. A system of dams helped to control the flow of water from the Tigris and two smaller rivers in the vicinity. Somehow these gates were opened and the flood waters had their effect to “dissolve” the palace, causing part of the defensive walls of the city to collapse.

The NET Bible note here gives this interesting detail: “Nineveh employed a system of dams and sluice gates to control the waters of the Tebiltu and Khoser Rivers which flowed through the city (R. C. Thompson and R. W. Hutchinson, *A Century of Exploration at Nineveh*, 120–132). However, the Tebiltu often flooded its banks inside the city, undermining palace foundations and weakening other structures. To reduce this flooding, Sennacherib changed the course of the Tebiltu inside the city. Outside the city, he dammed up the Khoser and created a reservoir, regulating the flow of water into the city through an elaborate system of double sluice gates (D. D. Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylon*, 99–100; J. Reade, “*Studies in Assyrian Geography, Part I: Sennacherib and the Waters of Nineveh*,” *RA* 72 [1978]: 47-72; idem, “*Studies in Assyrian Geography, Part II: The Northern Canal System*,” *RA* 72 [1978]: 157-80). According to classical tradition (Diodorus and Xenophon), just before Nineveh fell, a succession of very high rainfalls deluged the area. The Khoser River swelled and the reservoir was breached. The waters rushed through the overloaded canal system, breaking a hole twenty stades (about



2.3 miles or 3.7 km) wide in the city wall and flooding the city. When the waters receded, the Babylonians stormed into Nineveh and conquered the city (Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historica*, 2.26-27, especially 27.1-3; Xenophon, *Anabasis*, 3.4.12; P. Haupt, "Xenophon's Account of the Fall of Nineveh," *JAOS* 28 [1907]: 65-83). This scenario seems to be corroborated by the archaeological evidence (A. T. Olmstead, *History of Assyria*, 637)."

About the palace "melting", the NET goes on regarding this verb: it "is sometimes used of material objects (earth, hills) being softened or eroded by water (Ps 65:10; Amos 9:13). Nahum pictures the river banks inside Nineveh overflowing in a torrent, crashing into the royal palace and eroding its limestone slab foundations. Ironically, a few decades earlier, Sennacherib engaged in a program of flood control because the Tibilu River often flooded its banks inside Nineveh and undermined the palace foundations. Sennacherib also had to strengthen the foundations of his palace with "mighty slabs of limestone" so that "its foundation would not be weakened by the flood of high water" (D. D. Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylon*, 99–100). At the time of the fall of Nineveh, the Palace of Ashurbanipal was located on the edge of the sharpest bend of the Khoser River as it flowed through the city; when the Khoser overflowed its banks, the palace foundation was weakened (J. Reade, "Studies in Assyrian Geography, Part I: Sennacherib and the Waters of Nineveh," *RA* 72 [1978]: 51).

6. Verses 7-8: God's ultimate plan is for Nineveh to be led away captive, just like she led thousands captive from their own homelands. The part about Nineveh being like a pool of water refers to the fact that it was a great city that provided for its inhabitants, even if the surrounding country were desolate. Now, instead of looking forward to coming to it and living in it, people fled for their lives. People yelled to them to stop, but no one stopped for fear of their lives.
7. Verses 9-10: Scene change again, this time to the attackers who are taking spoils without measure from the city and leaving the

city empty and terrified. Imagine knees knocking and hearts melting, pain, and pale facial color. The terror is total.

## B. Mockery and Declaration of Judgment against Nineveh, v. 11-13

1. Verses 11-12: The symbol of the Ninevite soldier was a lion. The king of Assyria was pictured as a man who hunted and killed lions. Like the king of the beasts, the Assyrians were fearless and took enough prey for their family (the city of Nineveh). This nation was on the top of the food chain, at least for a while.
2. The point of Nahum is a taunting statement, “Where are you now, big lion? You are finished!” They are reduced to captivity and fleeing away. No more strong lion!
3. Verse 13: God declares that He is against the nation of Assyria. These are the scariest words any nation can face. Our own nation should take heed to such words, for it is clear that God will turn his face entirely against the USA in the not too distant future, if He has not done so already. Likewise anyone who knows this judgment is against them ought to be in fear for their souls (Matthew 10:28).
  - \* Chariots will be burned—totally destroyed with nothing left, like Assyria did to their own enemies.
  - \* Sword will kill the young men of Nineveh.
  - \* “Prey cut off” is not clear to this reader. The prey of v. 12 seems to be victims of Assyria, and the victims would not seem to be cut off in the sense of being killed, unless it means something like God will cut off the supply of prey so that they will not be sustained any further in their evil ways.
  - \* Their public relations people (messengers!) will be silenced. No more propaganda or boasting over their enemies.

MAP

**Text:** Nahum 3

**Title:** Woe to the Bloody City!

**Truth:** The sins of Nineveh and their consequences are detailed.

**Date/Location:** Wednesday May 27 and June 3, 2015 and Wednesday August 10, 2022 at FBC

## IV. Reading/Commentary on Chapter 3

The chapter alternates between charges of various sins and punishments for those sins.

### A. Sins of Nineveh and Assyria

1. Verse 1 declares a woe on the “bloody city.” A woe is like “alas!” It is a word used in funeral settings as a lament over the dead. It is used as a cry by the prophets of “grievous threatening” (HALOT). The sin is that it is “bloody.” It is a city of blood in that it sheds much blood of many other peoples and nations. It is also full of lies and robbery and has a never-ending supply of prey, that is, victims of its violence.
2. Verse 4 charges more sin against the city. They have a multitude of harlotries. The plural here probably indicates not just many prostitutes in the city, but also idolatry, which is spoken of in Scripture as spiritual harlotry in Israel since that nation was to belong exclusively to its ‘husband’ God. As a Gentile city, this concept does not apply as directly to Nineveh, but all peoples and cities owe their existence to God and should not depart from Him. Additionally, the city is the mistress of sorceries, indicating her participation in the occult. This was a Satanic city. Her evil work affected families and entire nations.
3. By comparison to Thebes (v. 8-10), also known as “No Amon.” This city, at the head of another ancient civilization, was situated along another great river—the Nile. Nineveh was neither morally nor strategically any better than that city, and God promises that Nineveh will find that out directly. Strategically, that city was a strong fortress as well—with the Nile River and water canals as its defensive system. She was allied with Ethiopia and Egypt. Put and Lubim are identified

generally as the area of Libya. Even with all that, “she was carried away” into captivity (v. 10). Her children were destroyed at every street, and the influential men were imprisoned. Nineveh should remember all about this—under Ashurbanipal, she was responsible for the demise of that city. She lived by the sword...

## B. Consequences

1. Verses 2-3 contains more vivid imagery of the attack on Nineveh. A horde of foreign invaders will come in with whips, chariots with rattling wheels, galloping horses, spears, and swords. The vast number of casualties will seem countless. In certain areas, people won't be able to walk in the city without tripping over dead bodies.
2. Verses 5-7 detail God's response to their harlotries and sorcery. He will “lift your skirts,” which means that the shame of a prostitute will be exposed. When figuratively used of a nation, it means that the nation will be completely humiliated and exposed. Further, God will cover the city in filth—like excrement—so that people will be shocked to see its demise from such a height of beauty and prominence. No one, however, will show sorrow or be a comforter amid her destruction because the city was so evil. Everyone will recognize that it has received its just desserts.
3. After the comparison to Thebes, God returns to the judgment theme of the chapter (v. 11-13). “You also will be drunk.” The word *also* is significant. Just like Thebes, you will suffer the same. Nineveh is drunk because she drinks of the cup of the wrath of God (Rev. 14:10, 16:19). She will be hidden and seek refuge from the onslaught of the enemy, but no refuge will be found. Then notice the mocking of all of their defenses:
  1. The fortifications will be like a fig tree with ripened figs. If you simply stand under the fig tree, grab the branch or trunk and shake it a little bit, the fruit just falls into your mouth. No problem! What this means is that the fortresses of Nineveh will be “as easy as pie” to overcome.

2. The soldiers, the great “lions” of Nineveh, the warriors of the city, will be weak like women. Take no offense, please, ladies! Generally women are physically weaker than men (1 Peter 3:7). It is no offense to call a woman a woman, but to say that a man is like a woman is a real insult. And not that God or Nahum were sinning by insulting Nineveh—they were mocking it.
  3. The gates of the city, instead of being shut securely, will be wide open for the enemies to walk through. Not that the inhabitants welcome in the invaders, but their defenses are totally overrun. Fire will consume the wooden beams of the city gates. There will be nothing left.
- C. More vivid imagery of destruction. In verses 14-15, the Ninevites are urged to store up water and prepare the fortresses for an invasion by adding more bricks. Even while trying to defend themselves, they will be completely consumed by fire and sword. They will not be able to stand before the coming disaster. Then in v. 16-17, Nahum likens the leaders of Assyria to locusts. When the sun is up and heats their bodies, they are ready to fly away to their next place. That is what happened to the generals and commanders of Assyria—they fled! Nineveh had a huge number of merchants, indicating the vast commercialization of the city. This meant that there would be more “stuff” for enemies to plunder (2:9).
- D. Conclusion, v. 18-19. The leaders (shepherds) in Assyria sleep, the nobles rest. This language describes the fact that these people are dead. The people are scattered about and no one will be able to get them together again. The destructive blow is permanent. Assyria will not arise again as a nation. And that will not be sad to the other inhabitants of the area! They will be happy because their enemy is devoured.

## **Conclusion to Our Study of Nahum**

I am struck by how similar the 2015 ISIS offensive in Iraq, which advanced rapidly since June 2014, looked like the Assyrians, and the Babylonians after them. The religion is different, but the brutal tactics are eerily similar.

God is not mocked. Galatians 6:7 says that what someone sows, they will certainly, eventually, also reap. Whether soon, in this life, or later in judgment, the results will make clear what kind of seed was planted in life. The Ninevites planted a terrible crop with their wickedness, and received a commensurate harvest. Those who live by the sword will die by it as well (Matt. 26:52). The specific situation of Nineveh offers the general principle that God judges wickedness. Those who oppose God, He will oppose. Those who conspire against God, God has a plan for them too. Those who do damage to God's people will suffer damage themselves. As they increase their sin, they heap up for themselves increased judgment. Our nation, the United States, is doing that just now. Some sins are practiced by a minority; but those who applaud and support those sins are many more (Romans 1:32; read the entire passage from 1:18-32 and let the full effect sink in).

We believe God is righteous. We know He is. We see that He expresses judgment in very harsh and even mocking terms which might offend our sensibilities. But this shows that righteousness is not incompatible with severe judgment against sinners, and we see it in both testaments.

God's grace is displayed even in this book that is filled with judgment. Look at 1:3a, 1:7, 1:15-16, 2:2.

What God prophesied through Nahum did indeed happen. In 612 B.C. the kingdom of Assyria was destroyed. God's word was vindicated, around 40 years after it was written. God's promises always come to pass—whether for good or for calamity. Bank on it!

MAP

## Resources

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nineveh>.

<http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2009/05/Nahum2c-Nineveh-and-Those-Nasty-Assyrians.aspx#Article>. This is an excellent article from a good source on Archaeology.

<http://www.slate.com/features/2013/08/histomapwider.jpg>. A diagram which shows the ebb and flow of world history graphically by depicting various kingdoms and their prominence through time.

<https://www.britannica.com/place/Nineveh-ancient-city-Iraq/Outline-of-the-city>