

Nahum

Nineveh's Destruction								
Certain				Detailed		Justified		
Chapter 1				Chapter 2		Chapter 3		
Destruction Decreed				Destruction Described		Destruction Deserved		
Verdict of Vengeance				Vision of Vengeance		Vindication of Vengeance		
What God Will Do				How God Will Do It		Why God Will Do It		
God's Anger				God's Actions		God's Accusations		
God's Predictions for Judah				God's Power for Judah		God's Justice for Judah		
Title 1:1	God's Attributes 1:2-8	Plotting Against God 1:9-11	Destruction is Judah's Deliverance 1:12-15	Battling vs. Judah's Splendor 2:1-2	Destruction & Despoiling 2:3-13	Judgment for Cruelty 3:1-7	Drunk when Destroyed 3:8-11	Burned with Fire 3:12-19
In Judah Against Assyria's Capital, Nineveh								
c. 660 BC								

Key Word: Nineveh

Key Verse: "The LORD is slow to anger and great in power; he will not leave the guilty unpunished" (Nahum 1:3a).

Summary Statement:

Certain destruction on Nineveh for her scheming against God and cruelty against man should comfort Judah that God will powerfully protect her due to His justice.

Application:

Do not mistake the patience of God as the impotence of God (Huang Sabin).

Nahum

Introduction

I. Title

- A. Nahum (נְחֻם) means "comfort" (BDB 637b).
- B. This is an appropriate name for the prophet who comforted Judah by decreeing the fall of the Assyrians, who had severely persecuted Israel.

II. Authorship

- A. External Evidence: The rest of the Old Testament is of no help in determining information about the author, as he is mentioned only in this prophecy.
- B. Internal Evidence: Nahum resided in the town of Elkosh (1:1), the location of which is presently unknown. Scholars offer four options: (1) a short distance from Nineveh (unlikely), (2) the city of Elkesi in Galilee (since their consonants are similar), (3) Capernaum means "City of Nahum" and the former Elkosh may have been changed to Capernaum in Nahum's honor, and (4) about 20 miles southwest of Jerusalem. As Nahum had a keen interest in the triumph of the southern kingdom of Judah (1:12, 15; 2:2), this last choice is most likely.

III. Circumstances

- A. Date: The short book mentions the fall of Thebes in Egypt (3:8-10), which occurred in 664 BC, yet Nineveh's fall (612 BC) had not yet happened by the time of Nahum's writing. However, Thebes was restored a decade after its defeat, but Nahum makes no mention of this. Therefore, the date of composition probably falls between 663 and 654 BC. This period occurs during the reign of Manasseh (686-642 BC), Judah's most wicked king, which makes it understandable why Nahum does not mention him in the superscription.
- B. Recipients: Although the message concerned Nineveh (1:1), the capital of Assyria, no record exists of it having reached this empire. The recipients were likely the people of Judah who needed to know that God would judge the nation that persecuted them.
- C. Occasion: The city of Nineveh had repented under the brief preaching of Jonah over one hundred years earlier (about 760 BC; cf. Jonah 3 and the chart on page 626). However, the revival was short-lived, and the city returned again to its evil practices. Assyria destroyed Samaria in 722 BC under Sargon II and soon afterwards invaded Judah in 701 BC under Sennacherib's leadership, but God delivered Hezekiah from his hand (cf. Isa. 36-37). By the time of Nahum, five decades later, God felt it was time to announce the doom of this evil empire to His people.
- D. Therefore, since the book was written during the period after the fall of Samaria to the Assyrians (722 BC) but before the fall of Nineveh itself (612 BC), it was written during a time of great fear in Judah that the same fate as Samaria awaited her. God used this prophecy against Assyria to encourage His people in Judah that they would not fall to Assyria as well. Apparently, only Judah received this word about Nineveh's fate (1:15).

IV. Characteristics

- A. Nahum is the only entire prophetic book against Assyria in the Old Testament. While the Book of Jonah is also concerned with Assyria, it is a narrative account rather than a prophetic pronouncement. The only other prophets who preached their entire books against other nations are Habakkuk (against Babylon) and Obadiah (against Edom). These three empires (Assyria, Babylon, and Edom) were the major empires that afflicted the Jewish people during the ninth to sixth centuries.
- B. Unlike most prophets, the preaching of Nahum was not a call to repentance but rather an announcement of irreversible judgment. By Nahum's time, Assyria had already filled up her measure of sins in a similar way that Jeremiah would later claim of Judah.
- C. The historical fulfillments of Nineveh's destruction are some of the most clearly documented prophetic fulfillments in archaeology today. See the accompanying chart, "Fulfillments of Nahum's Prophecies" (page 626 in these notes).

Argument

Nahum's prophecy, though directed towards the powerful and cruel Assyrian capital city of Nineveh, was given to benefit Judah. Nahum's scheming against God (ch. 1) will bring its destruction (ch. 2) as seen in its cruelty against man (ch. 3), so that Judah might find comfort that God will powerfully protect His people by destroying Nineveh due to His justice. The prophecy cites that irreversible destruction is decreed (ch. 1) and described in detail (ch. 2) because such judgment is deserved (ch. 3) upon the formerly repentant but backslidden nation.

Synthesis

Nineveh's destruction

1	Certain
1:1	Introduction
1:2-8	God's attributes
1:9-11	Plotting against God
1:12-15	Destruction = Judah's deliverance
2	Detailed
2:1-2	Battling vs. Judah's splendor
2:3-13	Destruction and despoiling
3	Justified
3:1-7	Judgment for cruelty
3:8-11	Drunk when destroyed
3:12-19	Burned with fire

Outline

Summary Statement for the Book

Certain destruction on Nineveh for her scheming against God and cruelty against man should comfort Judah that God will powerfully protect her due to His justice.

- I. **The certainty of God's judgment of Nineveh for scheming against the powerful and just God comforts Judah that the LORD will protect her by destroying Nineveh (Ch. 1).**
 - A. God gives this prophecy about Nineveh's doom so Judah will know its divine authority (1:1).
 - B. God's justice, power, and goodness reveal His vengeance on Nineveh and His covenant loyalty to Judah (1:2-8).
 - 1. God describes His justice and power to assure Judah of both His fairness and ability to overthrow Nineveh (1:2-6).

- a) The justice of God over His enemies should encourage Judah that He will judge Nineveh (1:2-3).
 - b) The power of God over nature should comfort Judah that He can judge Nineveh (1:4-6).
 - 2. The goodness of God towards Judah contrasts with His judgment of Nineveh to show His covenant loyalty to Judah (1:7-8).
 - C. Nineveh's plotting against the LORD will lead to its destruction to comfort Judah of God's protection (1:9-11).
 - D. Nineveh's destruction will help Judah find deliverance and safety again (1:12-15).
- II. Details about the future destruction of Nineveh should help Judah see that God is more powerful than Assyria and more than adequate for protection (Ch. 2).**
- A. Nineveh should prepare for battle because God considers the restoration of Judah's splendor an accomplished fact (2:1-2).
 - B. Nineveh's destruction and despoiling are compared to a lion's den filled with torn flesh to help Judah graphically visualize God's power over the puny Assyrians (2:3-13).
 - 1. The destruction of the city by the Babylonian chariot advance and flood should help Judah to graphically visualize God's power over the puny Assyrians (2:3-8).
 - 2. The despoiling of the city should show Judah how the proud city is looted and reduced to ruins (2:9-10).
 - 3. The destruction and despoiling are compared to a lion's den filled with torn flesh to illustrate God's power over the powerful Assyrians (2:11-13).
- III. God will destroy Nineveh due its cruelty so that Judah can realize that His justice would not let the city go unpunished (Ch. 3).**
- A. Nineveh will be made a spectacle before other nations due to its insatiable violence and cruelty so that Judah can realize that God's justice would not let the city go unpunished (3:1-7).
 - 1. Nineveh's bloodshed, lying and insatiable lust for plunder caused great violence and cruelty (3:1-4).
 - 2. God will make Nineveh a spectacle before other nations because it mistreated others (3:5-7).
 - B. Nineveh will be drunk when destroyed and will go into hiding for its cruel treatment of Thebes in Egypt in 663 BC (3:8-11).
 - C. Nineveh will be burned with fire because its defense efforts cannot stand up against God's vengeance (3:12-19).

Fulfillments of Nahum's Prophecies

Elliot E. Johnson, "Nahum," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 1:1495

Nahum's Prophecies	Historical Fulfillments
1. The Assyrian fortresses surrounding the city would be easily captured (3:12).	1. According to the Babylonian Chronicle the fortified towns in Nineveh's environs began to fall in 614 B.C. including Tabris, present-day Sharif-Khan, a few miles northwest of Nineveh.
2. The besieged Ninevites would prepare bricks and mortar for emergency defense walls (3:14).	2. A.T. Olmstead reported: "To the south of the gate, the moat is still filled with fragments of stone and of mud bricks from the walls, heaped up when they were breached" (<i>History of Assyria</i> . Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951, p. 637).
3. The city gates would be destroyed (3:13).	3. Olmstead noted: "The main attack was directed from the northwest and the brunt fell upon the Hatamti gate at this corner ... Within the gate are traces of the counter wall raised by the inhabitants in their last extremity" (<i>History of Assyria</i> , p. 637).
4. In the final hours of the attack the Ninevites would be drunk (1:10; 3:11)	4. Diodorus Siculus (ca. 20 B.C.) wrote, "The Assyrian king ... distributed to his soldiers meats and liberal supplies of wine and provisions ... While the whole army was thus carousing, the friends of Arbakes learned from some deserters of the slackness and drunkenness which prevailed in the enemy's camp and made an unexpected attack by night" (<i>Bibliotheca Historica</i> 2. 26. 4)
5. Nineveh would be destroyed by a flood (1:8; 2:6, 8).	5. Diodorus wrote that in the third year of the siege heavy rains caused a nearby river to flood part of the city and break part of the walls (<i>Bibliotheca Historica</i> 2. 26. 9; 2. 27.3). Xenophon referred to terrifying thunder (presumably with a storm) associated with the city's capture (<i>Anabasis</i> , 3. 4. 12). Also the Khosr River, entering the city from the northwest at the Ninlil Gate and running through the city in a southwesterly direction, may have flooded because of heavy rains, or the enemy may have destroyed its sluice gate.
6. Nineveh would be destroyed by fire (1:10; 2:13; 3:15).	6. Archeological excavations at Nineveh have revealed charred wood, charcoal, and ashes. "There was no question about the clear traces of burning of the temple (as also in the palace of Sennacherib), for a layer of ash about two inches thick lay clearly defined in places on the southeast side about the level of the Sargon pavement" (R. Campbell Thompson and R.W. Hutchinson, <i>A Century of Exploration at Nineveh</i> . London: Luzac, 1929, pp. 45, 77).
7. The city's capture would be attended by a great massacre of people (3:3).	7. "In two battles fought on the plain before the city the rebels defeated the Assyrians ... so great was the multitude of the slain that the flowing stream, mingled with their blood, changed its color for a considerable distance" (Diodorus, <i>Bibliotheca Historica</i> 2. 26. 6-7).
8. Plundering and pillaging would accompany the overthrow of the city (2:9-10).	8. According to the Babylonian Chronicle, "Great quantities of spoil from the city, beyond counting, they carried off. The city [they turned] into a mound and ruin heap" (Luckenbill, <i>Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia</i> , 2:420).
9. When Nineveh would be captured its people would try to escape (2:8)	9. "Sardanapalus [another name for king Sin-shar-ishkun] sent away his three sons and two daughters with much treasure into Paphlagonia, to the governor of Kattos, the most loyal of his subjects" (Diodorus, <i>Bibliotheca Historica</i> , 2. 26. 8
10. The Ninevite officers would weaken and flee (3:17).	10. The Babylonian Chronicle states that "[The army] of Assyria deserted [lit., ran away before] the king" (Luckenbill, <i>Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia</i> , 2:420).
11. Nineveh's images and idols would be destroyed (1:14).	11. R. Campbell Thompson and R.W. Hutchinson reported that the statue of the goddess Ishtar lay headless in the debris of Nineveh's ruins ("The British Museum Excavations on the Temple of Ishtar at Nineveh, 1930-1," <i>Annals of Archeology and Anthropology</i> 19, pp. 55-6).
12. Nineveh's destruction would be final (1:9, 14).	12. Many cities of the ancient Near East were rebuilt after being destroyed (e.g., Samaria, Jerusalem, Babylon), but not Nineveh.

Contrasts Between Jonah and Nahum

Jonah	Nahum
First Book (4 chapters)	Sequel (3 chapters)
c. 760 BC	c. 660 BC
Repentance from Sin	Return to Sin
Nineveh Delivered	Nineveh Destroyed
Israel Responsible	Israel Protected
Opportunity to Repent	No Opportunity to Repent
Narrative	Declarative
Focus on the Messenger	Focus on the Message
Prophet Disobeys	Prophet Obeys
Nineveh Obeys	Nineveh Disobeys
Deliverance from Water	Destruction by Water
Repented then Relented	No Repenting, No Relenting
Jonah's Wrath Refused	Jonah's Wrath Revisited
God's Compassion	God's Judgment