

Nahum- Lesson 1, Introduction

I. Writer and Date

As the title suggests, “*Nahum*” means *consolation*, or *consoler*. Whether this was intended to be symbolic of his role toward Judah, as some suggest, is subject to debate. Since the primary focus of the book is the destruction of Nineveh, it is difficult to see how that would bring much *consolation* to Judah. Perhaps Judah being made aware that the mighty Assyrians would not destroy them, as they had already done to Israel, could be seen as some sort of comfort. But since other prophets, like Zephaniah, have made it abundantly clear that Judah would also be destroyed (by the Babylonians), this seems to fall short of bringing any real *consolation*.

Though “*Nahum*” is named as the one to/through whom this vision concerning Nineveh is given, little else is known of him. The opening verse identifies Nahum as being “*the Elkoshite*”- but this gives no real indications of the prophet since no one is certain exactly what this designation means. Various suggestions have been made, such as:

El-kosh was a small settlement some 24 miles north of Nineveh. But this seems unlikely to be the meaning of the reference since the first historical mention of it appears in the sixteenth century A.D.

Capernaum, since that name means “village of Nahum”- but this too seems far fetched since this village was in Israel, not Judah. Remember that the Assyrians had already taken Israel prior to Nahum’s work. Perhaps the prophet could have been born there and then moved south to Judah, but there is no evidence to support the assumption.

Elkesie beyond the Jordan is also suggested- but again, there is no real foundation for the suggestion.

All that can really be said about Nahum with surety is exactly what v.1 says; that he was “*Nahum the Elkoshite*.” No one really knows any more than this. However, the important thing concerning Nahum does not concern either his ancestry or location. All that we need to know is that the Lord God showed him a vision concerning Nineveh, and he wrote it down by the revelation of the Spirit.

Date

The date for the writing of the book can be identified with more clarity because of internal evidence. In 3:8-10, Nahum mentions the fall of *No-amon*, which was the Egyptian city of Thebes. This occurred in **663 B.C.** at the hands of *Ashurbanipal*, king of Assyria. So, we know the book was likely written after this date. Likewise, 2:8-10 predicts the fall of Nineveh, which took place in **612 B.C.** from the combined forces of the Medes and the Chaldeans (Babylonians). Obviously, these two dates then imply that the book was written sometime between **663** and **612 B.C.** Most scholars locate the date toward the end of this period, somewhere around **630 - 612 B.C.**

II. Background

Since Nahum deals almost exclusively with Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria, there is little value in describing the political, moral, and religious conditions in Judah during the period (cf. Zephaniah for that information). Instead, a brief history will be given of the

Assyrian kings and events that led up to the fulfillment of Nahum's prophecy concerning the destruction of Nineveh. Though Assyria had been a nation for a long time (even at times a dominant one), we will begin our tracing of their history from the time of their efforts toward westward expansion and the push toward world domination in the Eighth Century, B.C.

Tiglath-pileser III, 745-727 B.C. This was the first Assyrian king to make a concerted effort to *rule the world*. Menahem, king of Israel, had given him the enormous sum of *"a thousand talents of silver so that his hand might be with him to strengthen the kingdom under his rule"*, cf. 2Kings 15:19-20. But eventually, Pileser moved westward into northern Israel and took captives back to Assyria, settling them north of Nineveh, cf. 2Kings 15:29; 17:6 and 1Chron.5:18-26. Though there are those who disagree, "Pul" (or *Pulu*) seems to be the Babylonian name given Tiglath-pileser after he defeated them. Those who disagree with this assessment think the biblical references to "Pul" are to a different king altogether.

Shalmaneser V, 727-722 B.C. Shalmaneser took the westward expansion further into Israel. Hoshea was then the king of Israel who decided that the change in power in Assyria presented a good time to rid Israel of the heavy burden of tribute it had been paying to Tiglath-pileser. So, he made a pact with the Egyptian king against Assyria. The problem with this was two-fold: 1) Israel's own wickedness had led them to trust in foreign alliances rather than God, cf. Isa.7:17-20; and, 2) Egypt was so weak by this time that they afforded no real help against the mighty Assyrians. Thus the plan backfired, and Shalmaneser began the final siege against Samaria (Israel's capital) in 725 B.C. But he died before it was complete in 722 B.C., 2Kings 17:3-6. Please read 2Kings 17:7-17 as it records a great synopsis of God's reasons for choosing to utilize Assyria to punish and destroy His people Israel.

Sargon II, 722-705 B.C. Sargon II was the Assyrian king who came to power when Shalmaneser V died. Sargon completed the job his predecessor had begun in the siege of Samaria. Though the biblical text does not record his name as being the completer of the siege, note that although Shalmaneser is named in 2Kings 17:3, the references which follow are only to *"the king of Assyria"*, cf. 2Kings 17:6ff; and 2Kings 18:9-12. Sargon was murdered in 705 B.C.

Sennacherib, 705-681 B.C. Sennacherib is the next king of Assyria that is named, 2Kings 18:13ff. He *"came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and seized them."* At which point Hezekiah, king of Judah, ransacked the gold and silver of the Temple to raise tribute payment to him. Sennacherib eventually came up against Hezekiah and Jerusalem anyway. He boasted of the siege by saying that he had shut up Hezekiah in Jerusalem "as a bird in a cage." The biblical account is found in 2Kings 18:13-37. But Hezekiah, with help and advice from Isaiah, prayed to God for deliverance, 2Kings 19:1-19. God heard Hezekiah's prayer and slew 185,000 valiant Assyrian warriors over night. The next day, Sennacherib arose and returned to Nineveh where he was later murdered while worshipping in the temple of his god, 2Kings 19:36-37.

Esarhaddon, 681-668 B.C. He was the son of Sennacherib who became king after his father was murdered, 2Kings 19:37b.

Ashurbanipal, 668-625 B.C. According to records, Ashurbanipal was an especially cruel king. He was the king who actually conquered No-amon (the Egyptian city of Thebes) in 663 B.C., as referenced in Nahum 3:8-10. It is said that tremendous bounty was taken back to Assyria as a result of his conquests.

Assur-etil-ilani, 625-620 B.C. (no information available)

Sin-shar-sihkeen (aka, Esarhaddon II), 620-612 B.C. The significance of this particular king is that he is the last vestige of Assyrian power. When the Medes and the Chaldeans (later known as Babylonians) besieged Nineveh, Assyria's capital city, Esarhaddon II gathered his wives, children, and wealth into the palace and burned it. He died in the fire, and with him, Assyria's last claim to world dominance. Nineveh finally fell in **612 B.C.**

Though Assyria lingered on as a nation for a few more years, obviously the tide had turned toward Babylon. Ashur-uballit was the last king of Assyria, and he disappeared from the historical record sometime in 609 B.C. This is the same year Pharaoh Neco's Egyptian army attempted to move through Judah to assist Assyria. The Judean king Josiah (unnecessarily) rebuffed Neco, and was mortally wounded in the ensuing battle. In the spring of **605 B.C.**, the combined Assyrian and Egyptian forces were defeated at **Carchemish** by Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian general. This brought the Assyrian Empire to a complete end.

The preceding has been a brief *historical* overview of the Assyrian Empire's later years. But the record of Nahum is the biblical prophecy of her (then) **future demise**. Why is this significant? A couple of reasons:

- 1) Assyria, at the time that Nahum is writing, is still very much **the** world Empire. Their rise to power had been the work of Jehovah.
- 2) Assyria had long been the enemy and antagonist of God's people. They had defeated and destroyed Israel. This was according to God's plan as punishment for her sins, cf. 2Kings 17:7-17.
- 3) But now, Assyria must also pay for her sins and cruelty. Just because Assyria had been brought to power and utilized by God to punish His own people, did not mean that they would escape retribution for their own sins and abundant cruelty!

III. Brief Outline of Nahum

A. Nineveh's doom by the decree of Jehovah, chp.1

1. The goodness and severity of Jehovah, vv.2-8
2. The complete overthrow of Nineveh, vv.9-15

B. Siege and destruction of Nineveh by the decree of Jehovah, chp.2

1. Assault upon Nineveh- the doom of the city, vv.1-7
2. Flight of the people and sack of the city, vv.8-13

C. Nineveh's sins and her inevitable doom, chp.3

1. Nineveh's fate brought upon herself as retribution for her crimes, vv.1-7
2. The fate of No-amon is to be the fate of Nineveh, vv.8-11
3. Inability of Nineveh's resources to save the city, vv.12-19

(condensed from A Commentary on the Minor Prophets; Homer Hailey; pp.251-252)

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Nahum- Lesson 1 Study/Discussion Questions

1. What does "Nahum" mean, and of what significance is this meaning to the book?
2. From where did Nahum hail, and why is this important?
3. Approximately when did Nahum prophesy, and how do you know?
4. What is *significant* about each of the following Assyrian kings:
 - a. *Tiglath-pileser III*?
 - b. *Shalmaneser V*?
 - c. *Sargon III*?
 - d. *Sennacherib*?
 - e. *Ashurbanipal*?
 - f. *Esarhaddon II*?
5. After reading the book through in one sitting ("Yes," all three chapters!), what is the *theme* or *purpose* of it?
6. If God *raised up* Assyria to punish and destroy Israel (and He did, cf. 2Kings 17:7 and Dan.5:21), why is He then going to punish and destroy them?

Nahum- Lesson 2, Chapter 1

Understand *going in* to our study of the book of Nahum that its primary focus and purpose is the decree of the *doom of Nineveh*. That being said, care must still be taken lest the opening verses are erroneously viewed as God “getting even” with Nineveh through His *vengeance, wrath, anger, and power*, cf. Hos.11:9. Although these first few verses of the book do make it clear that God, even as “God,” possesses all of these attributes, and that these qualities are being focused upon Nineveh, it does not follow that God’s “bad temper” is the cause of Nineveh’s impending doom. Such a notion seems to assume that the qualities described are *ungodly* attributes of God, but that we, as His creation, just do not have the right to point out His “imperfections.” While it **is** true that we do not have the *ability to understand* all of God’s ways (cf. Isa.55:8-9), and it **is** also true that we certainly do not have the *right to question* any of them (cf. Rom.9:14-21), neither of these facts gets to the real issue at point here in opening verses of Nahum’s oracle to Nineveh. God does **not** have any imperfections, or otherwise *sinful* characteristics- otherwise He would not be “God” at all. The notion that He manifests *anger, wrath, or vengeance* toward man in “sinful” ways, but that we just do not have the right to point out His shortcomings, is not only blasphemously wrong, it misses the point of the verses completely! Jehovah’s *anger, wrath, and vengeance* are **not ungodly** qualities. It **is** true that they can be wrong the way *we humans typically apply and utilize them*, but they are **not** wrong in the ways *God applies and utilizes them*. Thus, this is not a “right for Me, but wrong for you” proposition at all. The attitudes and activities of *vengeance, wrath, and anger* do not become righteous depending on *who* wields them, **but upon how they are wielded**. Obviously from this context, Jehovah wields weapons of His warfare against Nineveh in the *righteous* way.

I. The Nature of God: His *Righteousness* and *Justice* demand Nineveh’s *Doom*, vv.1-8

The “*oracle*” (or “*burden*”- as some translations render it) is Jehovah’s message through Nahum for **Nineveh, the capital of Assyria**. The word translated as *burden/oracle* literally refers to a *heavy load to be lifted up*. Hence, it here means to *lift up* God’s message before its intended audience. In this case, Nahum’s *burden* is an especially “heavy” pronouncement of complete destruction for Nineveh.

Beginning in v.2 and progressing through v.8, the prophet starts his message with several statements that seem to characterize the nature of Jehovah- at least with regard to His present disposition toward Nineveh. As pointed out above, the characteristics Nahum attributes to God (or better, God attributes to Himself through Nahum), seem *un-godly*. However, careful examination of both the text and historical context of Nineveh’s (by extension, Assyria’s) sinfulness reveals quite the contrary. To wit, note the characteristics, attitudes, and activities that are attributed to God:

Jealousy- While jealousy certainly can be sinful, cf. 1Cor.3:3; Gal.5:20; Jas.3:14-16, it is not so with God. Ask this question: “Why is God jealous?” Surely it is not over the *petty infatuations* of immature love, nor the *imagined slights* of one beloved. God’s jealousy is instead a legitimate desire for the explicit devotion of His beloved people. He has always faithfully been *their God*, and He will tolerate no rival of her affections. This is not ego-mania; it is founded in righteousness.

God cannot condone *spiritual adultery*, for it is no more right than *physical adultery*.

Vengeance- Again, improper (human) vengeance is wrong, cf. Rom.12:17-21. But *human* vengeance is not *divine* vengeance! Human vengeance is motivated by the desire to *get even*, or ahead, through *revenge*. God's vengeance is about *justice*, not revenge. God's vengeance requires the punishment of evildoers for such is *right* or *just*, cf. 2Thess.1:6-8. This again goes to the essence of who God is: *just, right, faithful, loving*.

Wrath- Wrath is one of the things Christians are told to "*put aside*" or "*put off*" in the New Testament, cf. Eph.4:31; Col.3:8. So again, is wrath "wrong" for us but "right" for God? The answer is "yes" in a sense because God's wrath is not like man's wrath. Man's wrath is the product of uncontrolled anger, cf. Jas.1:20; Eph.4:26; Matt.5:22. God's wrath is the product not of a violent and sinful temper, but of man's continued unrepentant disobedience of His will, cf. Heb.3:10ff. There is a world of difference between indignation and *righteous indignation*. So too it is with wrath (man's vs. God's)!

Jehovah has and will manifest these characteristics toward Nineveh not because of *His* ungodliness, but *theirs!* We *mortals* typically utilize these characteristics because of our *own* ungodliness, rather than that of *someone else*. This point is further illustrated in **v.3**. In the first part of the verse, God's **patience** is demonstrated. All of the previous characteristics of *jealousy, vengeance, and wrath* are tempered with the *slowness* of God's anger. They are not suddenly unleashed in sinful explosion as is often the case with man. Instead, God is *slow to anger*- often enduring years, decades, or even centuries of infidelity from His creation before executing justice. But as **v.3b** indicates, justice will be eventually executed by the great *power* of God. The *slowness* or *patience* of God's anger should never be mistaken for a willingness to suspend justice or excuse unrighteousness divorced from repentance, cf. 2Pet.3:8-9. Such would be contrary to the *essence* of God as much as would the previous sinful qualities of *jealousy, vengeance, and wrath!* This God will not, and cannot, do and still be God! He will neither fail to reward the righteous nor to punish the unrepentant, Rom.2:2. His delay is unfortunately taken for *weakness, or even non-existence* (both then and now), but certainly should not be so considered, Hab.2:3; Ex.34:6-7. The surety of punishment for the wicked is true for everyone as the other passages indicate, but has special application to Nineveh in Nahum!

In **vv.3b-6**, the *power* of God's *jealousy, vengeance, and wrath* is compared to various destructive forces of nature. Keep in mind the audience for this message. Nineveh was the capital of the most powerful and fierce nation of the world at that time. They feared no army of men and had no real understanding of Jehovah. But the forces of nature they understood, either by direct experience or indirection knowledge of history. So, Jehovah compares His power to:

A whirlwind and storm, v.3b. Are there any *natural* powers upon the earth more awesomely destructive than the tornado and the hurricane?

Clouds are the dust beneath His feet, v.3b. The voluminous storehouses of water that can flood the earth are but *dust-clouds* of the feet of God when it comes to the manifestations of His power.

He rebukes the sea and makes it dry, v.4a. Surely this is a reference to ancient Israel's passage through the Red Sea on dry ground as they fled from Pharaoh's Egyptian army. Power that can part the sea and dry the ground is power indeed!

He dries up all the rivers, v.4b. Like He had done the Red Sea previously, Jehovah also parted the Jordan River (at flood stage) for Israel to cross over into Canaan. While this verse certainly calls that historic event to mind, as well as the disheartening effect it had on the Canaanites who depended upon the Jordan to protect them (cf. Josh.3-4), apparently more than just that single event is intended. The verse says "*all the rivers.*" This seems to be indicative of a drought caused by Jehovah instead of just the crossing of the Jordan by Israel. In support of this view, note the examples that follow in the text:

Bashan and Carmel wither, v.4c. While Bashan (east of the Sea of Galilee and north of the Yarmuk River) got no more rain than the surrounding areas, its soil was very fertile and thus produced rich pastureland. *Carmel*, or Mt. Carmel, was the thickly forested mountain that jutted out into the Mediterranean Sea.

the blossoms of Lebanon wither, v.4d. *Lebanon* was situated north of Galilee and west of the Jordan. It was likewise known for its fertility with regard to its majestic cedars.

The point of all three of these illustrations is that God is powerful enough to make even the most fertile and productive areas wither and die. So too can He make a drought of the fertile power of Assyria's capital, Nineveh!

Mountains quake because of Him, v.5a. Ancient peoples considered mountains to be the pillars of the earth and symbols of strength and endurance. If God can cause the very *foundations* of the earth to quake, then He is powerful indeed, even to the eyes of the heathen. Certainly He who made the mountains from nothing can make them quake and quiver as well!

Hills dissolve, v.5b. Whether or not the Assyrians had any knowledge of volcanoes and their destructive power, I do not know. But this seems to be the example that Jehovah is using here to again illustrate *His destructive power*. Power to *dissolve hills* is certainly sufficient to destroy even the mighty Assyrians.

The world and its inhabitants are upheaved, v.5c. The picture painted here calls to mind the shifting plates of earth that causes land to crack open and one surface to be forced upward above another. This kind of *upheaval* is again representative of the *power* of Jehovah.

What's the point of all this imagery? If the earth and all it contains are under the direct control of an infinite power capable of such destruction and mayhem, "**Who can stand before His indignation? Who can endure the burning of His anger?**" v.6 asks. The answer is simple: **No one- not even the seemingly invincible Assyrians.** Like

molten lava that no man-made force can withstand, God's *righteous wrath* and *just indignation* will flow through and consume Nineveh.

V.7, seems to mark a sea change in the context. The verses previous to these have outlined and described God's *Present Attitude*, vv.2-3a; *Power*, vv.3b-4, and the *Extent of His Power*, vv.5-6. Then v.7 calls to attention the *other side* of God it seems- His *goodness* and the *refuge* He provides for those whom He *knows* as His own. Why is there such an immediate and stark change from the previous verses to this one? This verse is pivotal, and our understanding of it is vital to a proper comprehension of the earlier statements. **V.7** shows the **character** and **essence of God**. While His *present attitude* toward Assyria is *avenging and wrathful*, such is not Who God is! The *goodness* of the Lord, and His *strength* to protect those who trust in Him even in the face of tremendous trouble, manifest the *essence* of God much more than the attitudes and actions demonstrated toward the Assyrians. But, God's *goodness* also shows why His *wrath*, *vengeance*, *anger*, and *jealousy* is different from mortal manifestations of the same attributes/activities. God's *wrath*, *anger*, *jealousy*, and *vengeance* emanate from His *goodness*. How so? They are the products of His *righteousness*, *justice*, and *fairness*, cf. 2Thess.1:5-6ff. Put another way, it would violate the *righteousness*, *justice*, and *fairness* of God **not** to punish the extreme and unrepentant wickedness of the Assyrians with *wrath*, *vengeance*, *anger*, and *jealousy*! He could not, as God, allow such disobedience to His will to go unpunished and still be worthy of being (and being called) "God", cf. Ex.34:7! Because of this, **v.8** concludes the section with a prophetic prediction of Nineveh's future: "*He will make a complete end of its site, and will pursue His enemies into darkness.*"

II. The Completeness of Nineveh's Destruction, vv.9-15

The beginning verse of this latter half of the chapter, **v.9**, is a little difficult because of its ambiguity. *Who* is the antecedent of the pronoun "*you*"? Is it Assyria, or Judah (cf. v.15)? Commentators take one, the other, or both as an answer. It seems to make more sense to acknowledge that although the first part of the verse (including "*you*") is addressed to Assyria, the last sentence, "*Distress will not rise up twice*" is addressed to Judah. Assyria is being told that it matters not what plans they devise, Jehovah will nonetheless make a "*complete end*" of their plans and nation. Assyria had come up against Jerusalem previously, but had been rebuffed by the Lord in answer to Isaiah's and king Hezekiah's prayers for deliverance, cf. Isa.37:36-38. Jehovah here appears to be telling Judah that although Assyria besieged them *once*, they would not do so again!

V.10 describes the haughtiness and pride of the Assyrians with a couple of figures of speech. They are "*like tangled thorns*" in that they consider themselves impregnable. Likewise, the phrase "*like those who are drunken with their drink*" seems to refer the *intoxication* of the nation with their own perceived powers and abilities. Despite these excessively proud perceptions Assyria had of itself, the Lord would consume them as dry stubble.

Exactly *who* is being described in **v.11** is uncertain. From the verse, three things can be discerned concerning *him*:

- 1) he *went out from you*- presumably, Assyria;

- 2) he *plotted evil against the Lord*; and,
- 3) he is further described as a *wicked counselor*.

The last *person* who had been a threat to Judah from Assyria was Sennacherib in 702-701 B.C. when he besieged Jerusalem. If there had been a more recent threat from Assyria toward Judah from a particular man other than him, neither the biblical record nor history provides it. So, either the verse is speaking of Sennacherib specifically, or the overall attitude and spirit of the Assyrians generally, as being against the Lord.

Despite the *wicked counsel* given Assyria concerning her strength and power (v.11), in **v.12a** Jehovah says they will be “*cut off and pass away*.” The latter part of the verse turns its attentions toward Judah in assurance of protection against the Assyrians. God had indeed “*afflicted*” Judah through Assyria, but would not do so again. Further encouragement is given in **v.13** with regard to Assyria’s “*yoke bar*” being broken from off the neck of Judah. Indeed, God had used Assyria to destroy Israel and to punish Judah, cf. Isa.10:5-21. But these verses promise that the Assyrians would never again have Judah in the *bondage* of fear and persecution.

The promises and assurances made to Judah in the previous verse leads to a proclamation of judgment against Assyria in **v.14**. Despite their perceptions of themselves as an impregnable fortress of power that could not be stopped or assailed, Jehovah says, “*Your name will no longer be perpetuated*.” They were, in fact, far from invincible. In one of the most striking statements of the power of God and the surety of the demise of His enemies, He further says, “*I will prepare your grave*.” What a foreboding statement! To tell the most powerful nation of the world that *their grave is being prepared* is a statement of supremacy and omnipotence! And what is the reason for the *boldness* with which the statement is made? “*For you are contemptible*.” The wicked arrogance of Assyria has brought about their end.

The prophet seems to look forward in **v.15** to the heralding of Nineveh’s fall and Assyria’s subsequent destruction. *Peace* would be announced, *feasts* proclaimed, and *vows* of faithfulness to the Lord would result in Judah from God’s destruction of the “*wicked one*” whom He “*cut off completely*.” Perhaps this is the “*consolation*” to which Nahum’s name refers.

Nahum- Lesson 2 Study/Discussion Questions, Chapter 1

1. Read carefully v.2. Now read Eph.4:31 and Col.3:8. How do you reconcile God’s **prohibition** of *wrath* and *vengeance* in/by us when He clearly states through Nah.1:2 not only the **possession** but prophesys their **usage** Himself? Is this a case of “Right for *Me* but wrong for *you*”? Please explain.
2. Vv.2-3a speak of *avenging*, *wrath*, *vengeance*, *patience*, and *righteousness/justice*. **Why** does **man** employ these characteristics and actions versus **why** does **God** utilize them?

3. What is the significance or meaning in v.3a of the phrases “*slow to anger*” and “*great in power*”? How are these phrases particularly meaningful regarding Nineveh?
4. What is the point of the metaphors and descriptions of vv.3b-5?
5. How do the *positive affirmations* regarding God in v.7 “fit” within the context both before and after it?
6. To whom, specifically, is v.9 intended: a) Assyria; b) Judah; or, c) both Assyria and Judah? Please explain your answer.
7. Also from v.9, when did “*distress rise up*” from the Assyrians against Judah the **first** time (since God promises it would not do so “*twice*”)? cf. 2Kings 18:13 – 19:37 and Isa.10:24-27.
8. From vv.11-12:
 - a. **Who** was then “*at full strength*” and “*many*”?
 - b. **What** would then happen to **them**?
 - c. **Who** would then be “*afflict(ed) no longer*” and have “*his yoke*” and “*shackles*” torn off?
 - d. **Who** would do these things?
9. Note 2Kings 18:17-22, 28-35 in comparison with Nah.1:14, “*I will cut off idol and image from the house of your gods*”- what *irony* is involved in this statement?
10. Compare v.14 with 2Kings 19:20-37. What to the Assyrian king, *Sennacherib*?
11. How is Nahum a *comforter/consoler* to Judah in v.15?

Nahum- Lesson 3, Chapter 2

Much like the previous one, chapter two is easily divided into two sections. In the first part, comprised of vv.1-7, the prophet speaks of Nineveh's destruction as already accomplished, though it is still yet to occur. He pits the furiousness of the preparations to be made for the battle against the utter hopelessness of whatever resistance can be mustered, cp. vv.1-4 & vv.5-6. Then in v.7, the captured city is depicted as a conquered queen- *stripped, carried away*, as her maids mourn and *moan*.

In the second section of the chapter, vv.8-13, the prophet describes the fleeing of the inhabitants as the city is plundered and ransacked. The complete and final end of Nineveh is shown to come about through the Lord's power and might.

I. The Preparations to Defend Nineveh, vv.1-7

Exactly to whom the "*The one who scatters*" (NASB), or "*He that dasheth in pieces*" (KJV), refers is not specified in the text, v.1. In the absence of other biblical or historical information, a clear identification of the destroying individual/nation intended would be difficult at best. But both history and other scriptures give clues as to his identity. Though some scholars associate the description with the combined forces of Cyaxares (siak' surez) the Mede, and Nabopolassar the Babylonian king, most of the rest them who identify him as one man say that it is Nebuchadnezzar. Actually, both are probably right. Cyaxares and Nabopolassar were the forces behind Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian general who led the fight. The alliance of these two nations had been sealed with the marriage of Amytis, Cyaxares' daughter, to Nebuchadnezzar, Nabopolassar's son. Incidentally, Nebuchadnezzar built the famed "Hanging Gardens of Babylon" as a present for Amytis to help comfort her homesickness for the mountains of Media. All of which is probably "way too much information" for this study. However, scripture seems to confirm that the reference is to Nebuchadnezzar the Babylonian general, or Nabopolassar, his father the king of Babylon, because Jer.50:23 and 51:20 both use language similar to v.1 to describe the Babylonians.

But there is more to v.1 than the identity of *the one who scatters*. Consider carefully the rest of the verse. If the surety of Nineveh's destruction is complete, why then does the prophet urge them in v.1 to "*Man the fortress, watch the road; strengthen your back, summon all your strength*"? (Incidentally, be sure to note the NASB's marginal notes on v.1 concerning more literal translations of these phrases.) What good would any of these preparations do against the *sword of Jehovah*? "Absolutely none!" is the correct answer. So why was Nineveh urged to prepare for battle if it was such an utterly useless endeavor? Perhaps, though since the text does not provide a clear answer, Jehovah wanted Nineveh to prepare so that they could not later say that His utter destruction of them was due only to their being surprised by the attack. Also remember the arrogant and boastful attitude of the Assyrians with regard to their power in might as expressed in Isa.10:12-19. Let them back their boast against the strength of Jehovah! Though suppositional, this answer seems as good as any other.

In v.2, it is important to realize that "*Jacob*" and "*Israel*" are not being used separately to represent Judah and Israel, for Israel had already been destroyed. Instead, remember that "*Jacob*" was the *natural* name and "*Israel*" was the *spiritual* name given the nation by Jehovah. The verse specifies that *Jacob/Israel* would be returned to splendor

despite the devastation other nations had brought upon them. While their involvement with other nations had indeed resulted in *physical* and *spiritual* devastation, the rejuvenation here predicted must be *spiritual* since the physical nation never enjoyed such a renewal to its former glory and splendor.

The “*one who scatters*” from v.1 is now further identified as having *red shields* and being “*dressed in scarlet,*” v.3. This seems to also point toward the Chaldeans (Babylonians) and Nebuchadnezzar since they evidently most often wore red into battle, cf. Ezk.23:14. The vividness of the picture given by Nahum is probably intended to invoke fear in the Assyrians. They have long terrorized their enemies with great ferocity, and now it is their turn to be afraid. The weaponry of Nebuchadnezzar’s army is compared to *lightening flashes* and *torches* as they rush through the streets of Nineveh, v.4. The *suddenness* and gleaming *brilliance* of the attack is readily apparent from these verses.

“*He remembers his nobles,*” in v.5, is thought by some to still be referencing Nebuchadnezzar as he attacks, but it more probably refers to the king of Nineveh as he continues to rush in preparation for the attack which has already begun. The rest of the verse seems to support this explanation. It hardly seems to fit with the trained and fierce Babylonian soldiers of v.3. Why would they “*stumble in their march,*” or “*hurry to her wall*”? However, Assyrian “*nobles*”- untrained and ill-prepared for battle might well *stumble* as they *hurridly* and in panic made their way to defensive positions. The “*mantelet*” mentioned in the verse, marginally identified as a *covering* used in a siege, seems to refer to some sort of *covered structure* which was rolled up to the wall on four or six wheels. Inside, or under the *covering* of the structure, men were thus protected from spears, arrows, and stones coming from the wall above. Also, some *mantelets* seem to have been a *covering* over battering rams to protect the operators as they came near to breach a city wall. Thus, these hapless *nobles* “*hurry to her (the city) wall*” since the enemy has already come near enough to lay siege equipment and its *covering* next to the wall itself.

V.6 is taken *literally* by some, and *figuratively* by others. At least one ancient historian, Diodorus Siculus, claims that, due to heavy rainfall that year, the rivers Khosr and Tigris overflowed and destroyed a portion of the wall around Nineveh, thus allowing the invaders to access the city. Perhaps a more reliable and likely interpretation is that through Jehovah’s assistance, the Babylonians will *overflow* and *dissolve the palace* of Nineveh like *an overflowing river*. Since God obviously controls and utilizes *nature*, either or both may have been involved. Whatever the specific weapon utilized, God will cause Nineveh to be completely *flooded with destruction!*

In v.7, the captured and decimated city of Nineveh is depicted as a *deposed queen*, *stripped* of her royal crown and robes, and *marched away* as a *shackled captive*. At this sight, her maids who formerly cared for her every desire and need, can but *moan*, *mourn*, and *beat their breasts*.

II. Nineveh is Plundered while its Residents Flee, vv.8-13

V.8 says that Nineveh “*was like a pool of water throughout her days...*” The obvious question is “How was Nineveh like a *pool of water*?” We must remember is that in the arid regions of that part of the world, a pool of water, whether natural or man-made, was a *gathering place* for all life. Such was a hub of existence. Now consider the rest of the

verse to get the full effect, “*Now they are fleeing!*” What once was a place to which almost everyone *went* and *gathered*, now Nineveh has become a place from which everyone *flees* and *scatters!* Though orders of “*Stop, stop!*” are given as by a defending commanding officer urging his troops to *stand* and *fight* the heat of the enemy’s attack, “*no one turns back!*” - they all instead *turn* and *flee* in utter terror.

Because the defenders and residents are fleeing Nineveh *en mass*, the attacking command comes in **v.9** to “*Plunder the silver! Plunder the gold! For there is no limit to the treasure- wealth from every kind of desirable object.*” The Assyrians had been stockpiling booty from conquered nations for centuries. Now, their treasures are depicted as *unlimited spoils* for the Babylonians. No one or obstacle remains.

Thus, Nineveh is ransacked to the point that **v.10** records, “*She is emptied!*” Because of this complete destruction and desolation, *hearts melt, knees knock, anguish* comes upon the *whole body*, and *all the faces* of the Ninevites *grow pale!*

In **vv.11-12**, the once proud and fierce capitol of the Assyrians is compared to a *den of lions*, the *feeding place of young lions*, and a place where the *lion killed and tore* to fill *his den with food for his lioness and cubs*. For centuries Assyria had been the *lion*, *killing and tearing* to feed his *lioness and cubs*. But now, where is his *den/lair?* So complete was Jehovah’s destruction of Nineveh that its location was not definitely identified by archeologists until the turn of the nineteenth century! For centuries, the location of this formerly *fierce* capitol of the world was unknown! Behold the power of Jehovah- the *eater* has become *meat*, cp. Jud.14:14.

Though the destruction of Nineveh has been presented in this chapter as having already taken place, or at least taking place, in **v.13** the prophet returns to the *here and now* of his day by pointing out that these things are yet to occur. The surety of Nineveh’s destruction has caused him to show it as having already occurred, but in fact, it was still yet future, v.1. So, v.13 returns to the warnings of Jehovah, “*I will burn up her chariots in smoke, a sword will devour your young lions, I will cut off your prey from the land, and no longer will the voice of your messengers be heard.*” This statement emphasizes not only the *what* and *when* of Nineveh’s / Assyria’s destruction, but the *Who* also! Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon will be the *sword*, but Jehovah weilds it!

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Nahum, Lesson 3 Study/Discussion Questions, Chapter 2

1. Who is “*the one who scatters!*” of v.1?

2. Given the assurances in passages such as 1:8-9a,14, why is Nineveh/Assyrian *prepare for battle* in v.1?

3. What, if any, is the connection between v.1 and v.2?

4. What is the *point* or *purpose* of vv.3-4? Why?

5. To whom does “*He*” refer in v.5 (is it still “*the one who scatters*” from vv.1ff, or someone else)? Please explain your answer.

6. To what is the coming destruction of Nineveh compared in v.6? And in v.7?

7. How was Nineveh “*like a pool of water*” previously, v.8a? How is it depicted “*now*” in v.8b?

8. The past *plunderers* (Assyrians) are *plundered* in vv.9-10a. How are these formerly *fierce* people described in v.10b?

9. What is the point of the “*den of lions*” in vv.11-12?

10. Who is the *real enemy* of Nineveh and the Assyrians?

Nahum- Lesson 4, Chapter 3

In the first chapter, we saw that the justice and righteousness of God could not allow the vileness of Nineveh to go unpunished, cf. 1:3,14. The fierce violence and arrogant boasting of the Assyrians elicited Jehovah's wrath and vengeance as *just recompense*. In chapter two, the surety of Nineveh's demise is demonstrated by speaking of it as already taking place, cf. 2:3-7. Now in the final chapter of Nahum's prophetic discourse, there is a dramatic description of the ensuing battle that topples the capital city. The prophet also details the specific sins of Nineveh that have brought the anger of the Almighty to bear upon them.

I. God's retribution upon Nineveh and the reasons for it, vv.1-7

The "*bloody city*" of v.1 is of course Nineveh, so-called for the atrocities it has committed. But the *blood* that stained the city was not just that of foreign nations. The violence of the Assyrian capital had also been directed toward its own people. Monuments of this period describe in graphic detail the atrocities, violence, and total disregard for human life that was characteristic of the city. "Might makes right" seems to have been the overriding theme. The city is further described as "*completely full of lies and pillage*" (NASB, v.1). The ASV renders the Hebrew word *pereq* (*peh-rek*) as "*rapine*" instead of *pillage*. *Rapine* refers to *tearing in pieces*, as a lion does to its prey, cf. 2:12. The city is full of the *torn and bloody carcasses* - both foreign or native. Thus, her "*prey never departs*" because there is a seemingly endless supply.

Vv.2-3 provides "one of the most moving descriptions of the fierceness of a battle to be found anywhere in literature" (A Commentary on the Minor Prophets; Hailey, p.264). The terse style of the sentence structure seems only to add to the graphically poetic nature of the description. No comment from me can add to it further - just read the verses slowly and imagine witnessing the carnage first-hand.

While there have been many indications of wrong-doing and indictments levied against Nineveh to this point in the discourse, v.4 lays before us the case in unmistakably clear terms. Note the not-so-polished language of the ASV, "*Because the multitude of whoredoms of the well-favored harlot, the mistress of witchcrafts, that selleth nations through her whoredoms, and families through her witchcrafts.*" In order to attain the wealth, power, and domination she desired, Nineveh had prostituted herself by using all the wiles and enticements known to mankind. Her *tools of the trade* had been a total disregard for any and all moral authority from any source. She used any and every means at her disposal to get what she wanted. But most of all, she utilized cruelty and fierce violence. *Harlots* are usually identified by outward appearance. Nineveh had used the *attractive lure* of commerce, wealth, and power as her *sorceries* toward both nations and families.

Therefore, beginning in v.5, the Lord says, "*I am against you ...*" No longer would Nineveh be fighting the paltry forces of the nations of men, now she will do battle with Jehovah, the "*Lord of hosts*"! To this *regal queen of the nations* (cf.2:7), He will "*lift up your skirts over your face, and show the nations your nakedness and to the kingdoms your disgrace.*" Nineveh has been the *low and vile harlot* who disguised herself with the attractive garments of wealth and power. Now Jehovah will expose her to the world. Everyone would now see her truly for what she is, and will thus reproach and disdain

her. Through her complete and utter humiliation, she will become the shameful laughingstock of the world for generations to come. This is her *just recompense* from Jehovah. But He's not finished with her disgrace.

In **v.6**, insult is added to her injury because He says "*I will throw filth on you and make you vile, and set you up as a spectacle.*" To say that Nineveh will be "tarred, feathered, and ridden out on a rail" is not sufficient, but is on the right track of typifying Jehovah's *display* of Nineveh. Picture the once *attractive* woman of harlotry, stripped of her expensive outer garments, now set up as a spectacle in the town square of the world with mud and every vile excrement cast upon her to show her disgrace. This is Nineveh's fate.

So disdainful has the Lord made her appearance, that those who once flocked to admire her beauty and be enticed by her wiles now "*shrink from you and say, 'Nineveh is devastated!'*" Her rhetorical epitaph reads, "*Who will grieve for her? Where will I seek comforters for you?*" The *nakedness* of her shameful deeds now exposed, none will even be found to mourn!

II. The fate of No-amon is to be the fate of Nineveh, vv.8-11

A comparison to the city of *No-amon* comprises the next section of warning against Nineveh. The city of No-amon, so named for the god Amon, is otherwise known as either "No" or "Thebes." It was located about 450 miles south of Cairo. The point of the comparison is that Thebes was a great, prosperous, and well-fortified city which had previously fallen and been utterly destroyed. So also would Nineveh fall. Interestingly enough, the conqueror of Thebes was none other than Ashurbanipal, the king of the Assyrians! He ransacked the city in 663 B.C., which would make it only few years (or decades at the most) prior to Nahum's message of doom for Nineveh.

The city of Thebes had three different bodies of water about it that formed the "sea" to which the prophet refers in **v.8** as being its "*rampart*" and "*wall*". The great Nile River, various moats, and a series of canals created a formidable obstacle for those seeking to capture its considerable wealth. This compares directly to Nineveh that had both the Tigris and Khosr Rivers encircling much of the city and forming a barrier against would-be invaders.

The further *strengths* of Thebes are given in **v.9** as being the nations surrounding it. *Ethiopia* was to the south, *Egypt* to the north, *Lubim* (probably *Libya*) to the west, and *Put*. The location of *Put* is unknown, but perhaps it existed to the east of Thebes. These were given to show the presumed *unlimited* power that protected Thebes, and yet it fell to Assyria. The point of comparison is again obvious. Despite whatever might and power Assyria may possess itself, or be afforded through its allies, it, too, will fall, **v.10**! The "*small children*" of Thebes were "*dashed to pieces*" (cf. 2:1), and her "*honorable*" and "*great men*" were bound and sold. Again, the pointed lesson for Nineveh is clearly stated in **v.11**, "*You too will become drunk, you will be hidden. You too will search for a refuge from the enemy.*" Nineveh would be *drunk*, whether with their own pride or the wrath of Jehovah, and would fall into the pit of destruction where none could even see them. The mighty and ferocious warriors of Assyria would be forced to *look for a place to hide*.

C. The inability of Nineveh's resources to save the city, vv.12-19

In the final section of the prophetic work, Nahum challenges the great city to bring forth its best efforts to defend against the strength of the Lord's attack, all the while pointing out the utter futility of the endeavor. Their *fortifications* are compared to "*fig trees with ripe fruit- when shaken, they fall into the eater's mouth*" **v.12**. Nineveh's defenses are the *ripe figs* that will drop into the *mouth* of Jehovah's destruction! Why is this so? The answer is clearly given in **v.13**, "*your people are women in your midst*" and the "*gates of your land are opened wide to your enemies*". Nineveh had been a proud and powerful city, representing all the might of the Assyrian nation. But before the forces of the Lord, even the best efforts of their valiant warriors were powerless.

They are urged to *prepare themselves* for battle in **v.14**, but again shown the complete hopelessness of any and all preparations they could make in the first part of **v.15**, "*There fire will consume you, the sword will cut you down; it will consume you as the locust does.*"

The introduction of the *locust* in **v.15a** is carried forth into the next few verses to make additional comparisons. Initially, the locust are pictured as consuming Nineveh. But note that the simile changes slightly in the latter part of the verse. Here Nineveh is told to multiply themselves like *creeping* and *swarming locusts*. What's the point? The answer is revealed in **vv.16-17** where it is explained that:

While the "*traders*" (foreign commercialists) have increased as *locusts* in Nineveh, they, also *like locusts*, will *strip* her and *fly away*; and that

The "*guardsmen*" and "*marshals*" of Nineveh are compared to *locusts* who "*settle in the stone walls on a cold day*" for warmth, but then "*flee*" when the "*sun rises*" in the heat of the day. The *heat* of the Lord's battle will produce the same effect!

The comparison is taken one step further when **v.17b** says, "*and the place where they are is not known.*" The apparent meaning is that also like locusts, once they have *stripped and fled*, no one knows where they go. Nineveh will disappear from human observance after the Lord of hosts is finished with them.

A few final metaphors are given in **v.18** to drive home the utter hopelessness of Nineveh's plight:

"*Your shepherds are sleeping*" - Those who should be *watching over* and *protecting* the city are as useless against the Lord's vengeance as *sleeping shepherds* are to sheep. They are likely "*sleeping*" in death's cold grave.

"*Your nobles are lying down*" - Like the military leaders (shepherds), the *city fathers* and *civil rulers* are resting in the peaceful slumber of death.

"*Your people are scattered...there is no one to regather them*" - The people of Nineveh (and the Assyrian nation as a whole) are the *sheep*, now irreconcilably lost forever.

Nineveh's ultimate end is summed up in the concluding verse of the book, **v.19a**, "*There is no relief for your breakdown, your wound is incurable.*" As was stated back in **1:14**, Jehovah has *prepared Nineveh's grave*. The death knell has sounded and all that remains is the *mourning*. But, **v.19b** adds insult to injury by pointing out that there will

be none that will mourn, for her enemies will instead rejoice at her passing. Nineveh, as a nation, has spent her life dispensing *evil* on all the nations with whom she has come in contact. Now it is their turn to mock and rejoice at her passing.

Nahum, Lesson 4 Study/Discussion Questions, Chapter 3

1. Of what is Nineveh depicted as being “*completely full*”?
2. Vv.2-3 use terse phrases to vividly describe chaotic destruction of Nineveh. Which phrase or phrases is most striking to you?
3. V.4 makes clear “the why” of this devastation. What is the reason?
4. What *images* are given in vv.5-6 to illustrate Nineveh’s coming *disgrace* and *spectacle*?
5. Who will *mourn* for Nineveh, and why?
6. What is the point of the comparison between *No-amon* (Thebes) and *Nineveh* in vv.8-11? What is somewhat *ironic* about this comparison?
7. To what are Nineveh’s *fortifications* compared in v.12?

8. Why are Nineveh's *people* compared to *women* in v.13?

9. Reminiscent of 2:1, why does 3:14 urge Nineveh to *make preparations* for this coming onslaught given the inevitability of its destruction (cf. v.19 and 1:14)?

10. Vv.15b-17 compare Nineveh to *locusts* in a couple of different ways. What are they? Please explain the comparisons.

11. What are Nineveh's *shepherds* and *nobles* said to be doing in v.18? What will be the result?

12. Instead of *mourning* for Nineveh's destruction, what will those do who witness her *funeral*? Why?

13. In what ways might America be compared to Assyria?

14. What lessons do you think "we" should *take to heart* from the book of Nahum?